



History's Influence Upon Conduct

Lesson Aim: To note Joshua's use of Biblical history—as arguments for fearing and serving God.

L6. Date: May 1959. **Text:** Joshua 24:1-14. **Topic:** God: Service of.

Today, we view the solemn assembly of Israel to hear the last great address of Joshua, their veteran general. Finding his life prolonged beyond normal, he was anxious to keep fresh in the people's minds the commands of their God. This follows the example of Moses, who, just before his death, solemnly addressed the people to review their history and to draw lessons there from. The basic idea is this: "They owed their preservation to God, and to Him also was due their possession of their newly acquired land. Their future would be decided by whether they would remain loyal to His service or follow the worship of the gods of the people whom they had dispossessed." (A. Cohen)

This solemn meeting was held at Shechem (later known as Sychar). It was a place hallowed by historical and religious associations. The promise of inheritance of the land was first given to Abraham here, and here he built his first altar to God. Genesis 12:6ff. Upon entering the land, Joshua and Israel gathered here and heard the reading of the blessings and curses of the law. Upon which they renewed their covenant with God, Joshua 8:30-35. Apparently the sanctuary had been erected here also, in that the people are said to gather "before God" in Shechem, verse 26.

The substance of Joshua's address may be divided into two parts. First, he briefly reviews the history of Israel from the call of Abram to the inheritance of the land, verses 2-13. Second, he draws from this moral obligation upon Israel which binds them to obedience to God, verses 14-16. Let us study this lesson with our eyes open for lessons which we may apply to our own life and thereby become more consistent Christians.

EXPOSITION

I. God Can Call Unlikely Men and Make Them Great, 24:1-3.

1. Often He calls unknown men, verse 2. There was nothing about Terah, his son Abram, nor any other member of their family to distinguish them before God chose to issue His call. They seem to have been merchants, very likely traveling about a regular trade route. (At least, Abraham was a traveling merchant-shepherd while he was in Palestine.) God called Abraham (formerly called Abram) by the free determination of His purpose in grace, not because of merit on the man's part. In fact, a brief survey of Christian history will reveal that God's great men have almost universally come from insignificant backgrounds. Paul has wisely observed, "*For ye see your calling brethren how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, no many noble are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise,*" I Corinthians 1:26-27. Let no one who reads these words despise his lowly background, for of such come the spiritual giants of God.

2. Often He calls men from evil environment, verse 2. Reference to the fathers who "*dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time,*" simply means the former home of Abram which was across the Euphrates River from Canaan. The geographical location is of secondary importance, however. The amazing thing is that those who lived in Ur of the Chaldees were pagans, "*They served other gods.*" Even Abram, himself, was reared in an environment where he was taught to revere a god other than Jehovah God! There is some evidence that Ur of the Chaldees was the center of a cult of moon-worship, which was rather widely spread throughout this section of the ancient world. This is likely the reason Abram was called to leave his family behind when he journeyed from Ur, Genesis 12:1. There comes a time in the life of us all that we must choose between family-environment and God. The obedient Christian always obeys God.

3. He calls man for a specific purpose. All of God's work in history is in performance of His purposes. When He called Abraham, he had in mind the nation and the Messiah whom He would send through them. Thus the call of Abraham is not the call of a single man, but another step in the performance of the Divine purposes. It is encouraging to know that, whatever our ability, God calls us because we can fill a place in His plans. As the church is, like a body composed of proper parts (I Corinthians 12:12-31) in order to function most adequately, so each believer fills a niche in the grand scheme of God's work. God help us to be faithful!

4. He prospers those whom He calls, verse 3. Having exercised such influence upon Abram as to bring him from Ur, God directed the way into Palestine. The gracious guidance and protection of God was over him in all his wanderings to and fro in that land. A son of promise, Isaac, was given to him and thus his seed was multiplied in the great nation that came through the generations that followed. Isn't it wonderful to realize that God directs His own? No one is saved and set out on his own to do the best he can. God's care is still exercised over His redeemed. Thank God for saving and keeping grace!

II. God Permits Dark Days to Come Into Our Experience, 24:4.

1. Dark days give an opportunity for God to show His power. Not all went well in Canaan. Abraham died without inheriting the land God had promised. His grandson, Jacob, was living in the land with his family and still the inheritance had not been realized. Famine arose in Canaan which necessitated Jacob's moving to Egypt. Then followed the four hundred year stay there during which time Israel endured a most grievous and degrading bondage. It seems God had forgotten them and His promise to Abraham was cast aside. Such was not so, God raised up Moses and brought Israel from Egypt with a great demonstration of power. The Red Sea opened, manna came from heaven, water came from the rock, the pillar of cloud and fire directed their course—this God manifest His power in their behalf. Why should we mind dark days if they are occasions for God to draw near to bless?

2. Dark days give an opportunity to prove God's faithfulness. When Moses and Joshua finally brought Israel to Canaan, they stressed that it was in fulfillment of God's promises. When Israel was settled in the land she was reminded it was due to God's faithful performance of His promises. Let all believers take courage. Our God is faithful and able to perform every promise He has made. (Romans 4:21); II Peter 3:9). We may safely trust in Him.

III. God Performs Acts of Deliverance and Protection, 24:5-10.

1. He delivers from trouble and sorrow, verse 5. The appearance of God in the burning bush caused Moses to stand in holy awe and hear these solemn words: *"I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt and have heard their cry . . . for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them,"* Exodus 3:7-8. This is only one manifestation of the

truth that God is moved by our troubles and is ready to help, II Chronicles 16:9. The Psalmist declares that to cry unto the Lord in trouble is to receive His deliverance, Psalm 34:4, 6; 18:6. We are assured that Jesus Christ, our high-priest, is concerned about our troubles and is moved by our sorrows and we can find solace in Him when calamity comes, Hebrews 4:14-16.

2. He delivers from death, verse 6-7. The journey to Palestine from Egypt went the long and difficult route by way of the peninsula of Sinai. Israel found herself surrounded by mountains, the Red Sea, and the fierce Egyptian army. Upon the prayer of Moses and the moving of God, the water of the Red Sea was opened and Israel passed through on dry ground. Then the Egyptian army followed and were drowned in the waters. Read Exodus 14. Thus was Israel saved from further bondage or from death. This is the glorious work of God. Though we do not find ourselves in like circumstances politically or socially, we are assured that God has *“delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling,”* Psalm 116:8. Death no longer holds fears to him who lives anew in Christ Jesus. He who lives and believes in Jesus never really dies, John 11:25-26. Death has no dominion over him, neither does death have terrors for him. It becomes as a sleep of refreshment. As important as preservation from physical death is, it is more important to be delivered from spiritual death, as this Jesus alone can do, I John 5:12.

3. He delivers from failure, verse 8. Israel came out of Egypt as a mass of freed slaves. They knew nothing of self-government. They had been slaves since birth. They had little organization and no experienced army. Yet, they faced and defeated the Amalekites in the wilderness and invaded Canaan with amazing results. All this is because God was with them, keeping them from failure. People who lived in defended cities and were settled in the land were suddenly overcome. It could be done only under God. Thus the lands of the Moabites and Amorites were taken. We, too, can have bold confidence of victory when we are in the will of God. Like Samuel, whom God qualified as a prophet and allowed none of his words to fall to the ground (I Samuel 3:19), we can be a great influence for God. God always gives the victory to those who aim to serve to His glory, I Corinthians 15:57.

4. He delivers from the purpose of evil men, verses 9-10. The opposition of Balak is mentioned in Numbers 23 and 24. Planning a battle against Israel, he calls for the prophet Balaam to come and curse her. When Balaam uttered his prophecies God caused them to be blessings rather than curses. Thus He spared Israel from the designs of these evil men. Another illustration of God's work to overcome the purpose of evil men is the case of

Paul. He was arrested and sent to Rome for the purpose of getting rid of him and his teaching. However, in Rome he was able to win members of Caesar's own household, as well as having time to write several of the epistles now in our New Testament. God overruled the evil for good. See Paul's testimony of God's work in his behalf in I Timothy 4:16-18. Why should we fear though evil men may oppose the good we would do? God is faithful and righteousness will triumph. Let us take heart.

5. He delivers by His own power working through men. The Old Testament makes many references to men being especially qualified to service by God's power and spirit. It qualifies men to govern, Numbers 11:17, 25-29; it qualifies men to prophesy, II Kings 2; it motivates the heathen to perform God's will, I Chronicles 5:25-26; it qualifies men for technical skills, Exodus 36:1-4, 8. The power of God, through the Spirit, is still available to us. He is the source of power, Romans 15:19; He grants wisdom, I Corinthians 12:8; He selects and sends ministers, Acts 13:2-4; Acts 20:28; He directs to places of service, Acts 16:6-10; He indwells the believers, John 14:17; He teaches, John 14:26; He convicts of sin, John 16:8; He helps our weakness, Romans 8:26. He comforts, Acts 9:31. Let us never imagine that we have any less the leadership or help of God than the people of Israel had. Let us use what we have. That will assure success.

IV. God Alone Can Qualify Us to Perform Great Accomplishments, 24:11-13.

1. Battles are won by His power, verse 11. The great victory of Jericho where the walls of the city fell down under the hand of God, was sufficient evidence that God was fighting for Israel. However, whether it was a single city of the united opposition of several kings (as in Joshua 10:3-27), God granted victory. It matters little whether we fight political or religious battles. The rule of God is the same: "*Not by might (numbers), nor power (organization), but by my spirit with the Lord of hosts,*" Zechariah 4:6.

2. Even nature is used for His purpose, verse 12. There are several references to the use of natural causes to discomfit the enemy and aid His people. God used the earthquake (Joshua 6:20), hornets (Deuteronomy 7:20; Exodus 23:28), stormclouds with hailstones (Joshua 10:11), wind (Numbers 11:31; II Samuel 5:23-25), etc. Since God is the creator of all, why should we consider that nature is beyond His power? If circumstances were such to necessitate it, God would still reverse the workings of nature that His will might be performed. What encouragement this gives the

Christians. We may all say, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,*" Philippians 4:13. (For a New Testament example of God's use of nature see Acts 16:25-34).

3. Possessions are inherited under His provision, verse 13. When the conquest was ended, Israel was to look back upon it and see that God had given her the land. Her military success was not enough to have gained possession. The sword and the bow had been used, but only under God were they used effectively. Thus, in a true sense, God had given her the land, its cities, and its vineyards. It is well to remember that even temporal blessings come through the aid of God. We have nothing which we did not receive, I Corinthians 4:7. Whether we have much or little, what we do have is the gift of God and must be used to his glory in our lives. Of nothing can one say, "This is mine. I can do with it what I please." All we are and have is entrusted us of God and we are but stewards who must give an account.

V. All God's Works Challenge Us to Highest Service, 24:14.

1. God's works challenge us to a holy reverence, verse 14a. "*Now therefore fear the Lord,*" actually means, "In view of all that God has done for you in deliverance from Egypt, preservation in the wilderness, and settlement in Canaan, let your hearts be filled with a holy reverence for him." A deep sense of obligation and obedience must be impressed upon our minds. Remembering His great power, vicarious sacrifice, atoning love, and victorious resurrection—all in our behalf—we stand somewhat awed before Him. How can we do less with the challenge ringing in our hearts? "*Ye are not your own; For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's,*" I Corinthians 6:19-20. Oh, I must not come carelessly into His sacred presence!

2. God's works challenge us to a holy motive in service, verse 14b. "*Serve him in sincerity and in truth.*" Let uprightness and integrity, not outward semblance only, mark your service for God. Do not have other gods secreted away in your heart while you maintain the form of worship of the true God. That lowliness of mind and forgetfulness of self which so perfectly marked the ministry of our Lord Jesus should likewise characterize our lives. It is base and evil to serve God simply for personal profit or because one feels the sense of obligation. Let anyone draw close to God and spend time in communion with Him, and service to God becomes more precious than life, Acts 20:24. To know God intimately is to love Him; to love Him is to serve Him in sincerity and in truth.

3. God's works challenge us to perfect loyalty, verse 14c. "*Put away the gods which your fathers served.*" When one becomes a disciple of Jesus he should once-for-all renounce and repudiate the things of darkness which formerly characterized his life, II Corinthians 4:2. Surrendering sinful lusts and desire for personal ambitions, the believer becomes the servant of God, surrendered to His will and subject to His directions. However, instead of lowering man's position, being a servant of the Divine Lord is a high and holy privilege and is man's greatest honor. We cannot do less than serve our Lord Christ. To fail is to be a traitor to His kingdom.

QUESTIONS

1. Tell something about Shechem. Locate it on a map of Palestine.
2. Tell something of Abraham's background when God first called him.
3. Why did Jacob and his family go into Egypt?
4. What circumstances did they undergo in Egypt?
5. Briefly trace the Exodus from Egypt to Canaan.
6. Give several illustrations of God's use of nature for His purpose.
7. Give some illustrations of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament.