

**“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”:**  
A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

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THE TESTIMONIES OF THE LORD  
(JOSHUA 24:1-13)

**I. Introduction**

**II. Joshua Gathers the Tribes (Joshua 24:1)**

- A. In verse 24, Joshua gathers “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.”
- B. Joshua may have chosen Shechem because this was where the Lord had spoken with Abraham so many years ago.
  - 1. In Genesis 12:6, we read that “Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.”
  - 2. Then “the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him” (v 7).
  - 3. Therein lies the significance of Shechem: It was one of the holy places where the Lord had appeared to Abraham and made a promise to him—a promise that the Lord had fulfilled in Joshua’s time.
  - 4. By choosing Shechem as the new holy place, Israel has chosen a site that is loaded with meaning, because Shechem was a place associated with God’s covenant with his people (David Howard, *Joshua*, 430).
- C. All of Israel was represented at Shechem that day: “all the tribes of Israel.”
- D. The Scripture lists the leaders of Israel: “the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the possible significance of Shechem as the meeting place? (2) Who were assembled before the Lord?

**III. Beginnings (Joshua 24:2, 3)**

- A. Coming to verse 2, we read: “And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.’”
  - 1. This was how the story of Israel actually began.
  - 2. Just as the creation of the world began with darkness, so too the creation of God’s people.
  - 3. Once upon a time, Israel’s ancestors did not serve the Lord YHWH. Instead, “they served other gods.”

- B. But then the true God of the heavens and the earth stepped into this situation: “Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many.”
- C. Abraham occupies a central role in the history of redemption, because Abraham was called by God to be the father of his people. Abraham was the one to whom God announced his covenants: “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham” (Lk 3:8).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What religion did the parents of Abraham adhere to? (2) How did God intrude into the situation? (3) Why does Abraham occupy such a central place in the Jewish mind?

#### IV. The Sons of Abraham (Joshua 24:4-5)

- A. Verses 4-5 talks about Abraham’s sons.
- B. The Lord says, “I gave him Isaac.”
- C. Then “to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau.”
- D. Jacob and Esau come a parting of ways in the Abrahamic line: “And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Who were Abraham’s sons? (2) What happens to Jacob and his children?

#### V. Israel in Egypt (Joshua 24:5-6)

- A. When Israel goes down to Egypt, Israel were turned into slave labor by Pharaoh.
- B. Once again, God intrudes for the sake of his people: “And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out” (v 5).
- C. The major act of deliverance associated with the Exodus was the parting of the Red Sea: “Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt” (vv 6-7).
- D. The theme of being a witness to the Lord’s works appears in a major way in the New Testament: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses* of his majesty” (2 Pet 1:16).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What happened to Israel in Egypt? (2) How does God come through for his people? What does God do to the Egyptian armies? (3) How does the theme of eyewitness tie the events of the Exodus and the event of the Lord Jesus Christ?

#### VI. Israel in the Wilderness (Joshua 24:8-10)

- A. In verses 8-10, we come to Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness.

- B. The Lord refers to two key events that took place during this period.
  - 1. Israel's battles with the Amorites (v 8; cf. Num 22).
  - 2. Israel's battle with Balak of Moab (vv 9-10; cf. Num 22-24).
- C. Although Israel had been disobedient to the Lord, the Lord has continued to preserve them and to fight for them. This speaks volumes about the Lord's patience with his people. In spite of their sinfulness, he continues to keep his promise to Abraham.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What were the two battles Israel fought in the wilderness? (2) How did the Lord come through for his people?

## VII. Israel in the Promised Land (Joshua 24:11)

- A. We come to the fourth and most recent stage of God's works for his people—the crossing of the Jordan and Israel's first major victory in the Promised Land.
- B. The list of opposing nations: "And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand."  
—The nations that are listed here are the same as those we find in 3:10.
- C. The Lord goes on to say, "And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow."
  - 1. The reference to the hornet comes from Exodus 23:28: "And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you."
  - 2. But who are these hornets? According to David Howard, there are at least three possibilities (Howard, *Joshua*, 432).
    - a. The hornets may be understood metaphorically or symbolically. They represent "the terror or panic that an encounter with Israel's God would engender," Howard writes.
    - b. The hornets are a symbol of Pharaoh himself, whose symbols were a bee or a hornet.  
—But the problem with this view is that the Scripture does not mention Egypt or even hint that Egypt would be involved in helping Israel.
    - c. The hornets are literal hornets that Israel may have used in warfare.
      - i. According to Howard, insects were used as weapons in ancient warfare.
      - ii. But he also explains that there is no evidence from Scripture that Israel adopted such a tactic.
  - 3. In Howard's view, the most likely interpretation is that the hornets are to be understood metaphorically—they represent the terror or panic that falls on people when they encounter the Lord God of Israel.
  - 4. Personally, I tend to think that the Lord may have used literal hornets, insects, and possibly other forces of nature to drive out the enemies of Israel.
  - 5. However we interpret the hornet here, the underlying point is that it was God who fought for Israel.

- D. Verse 12 continues by saying, “And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow.”
1. The two kings of the Amorites here may be Sihon and Og. If so, this verse is a very brief flashback to Israel’s battles in the wilderness.
  2. But it is more likely that the two kings of the Amorites are Adonizedek and Jabin, who were the leaders of the northern and southern coalitions (cf. Josh 10-11).
  3. In Joshua 10:6, the coalition was led by “the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country...” So the two kings in view here were likely not Sihon and Og, but Adonizedek and Jabin.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What were the nations that Israel fought in the land of Canaan? (2) How are we to understand “the hornet”? (3) Who were the two kings of the Amorites mentioned in verse 12?

### VIII. The Fruits of His Labor (Joshua 24:13)

- A. Finally, verse 13 tells us about the fruits of the Lord’s labor for Israel.
- B. At the end of it all, from the call of Abraham to Israel’s victories over the Amorites, what has the Lord won for Israel? The Lord says, “I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.”
- C. Basically, for that relatively short time of battle, Israel had acquired a lifetime of blessing. So, yet again, God has been faithful to his promises. “The land was nothing but God’s gracious gift to his people.”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What were the fruits or blessings that Israel now enjoys as a result of the Lord’s work in and through their lives? (2) What does this say to us about the Lord’s devotion toward his people?

### IX. In This Is Love

What we have in Joshua 24:1-13 is a revelation of what divine love is like. Divine love is the self-giving of God to lesser creatures for their good. This self-giving of God finds its highest form in the Lord Jesus Christ, when God comes in human flesh to take the sins of his people upon himself and reconcile them to himself (2 Cor 5:19). We are reminded of the words in 1 John 4:10: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” And then it doesn’t even stop there. God continues to give himself to his people. After exalting the Lord Jesus to his right hand, God grants to Jesus the Holy Spirit. And Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to his beloved people (Acts 2:33). This is how God has loved us. How will we respond to God’s self-gift to us? The best gift that God is asking from us really is ourselves. God wants us to give ourselves to him just as he gave and continues to give himself to us.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does God reveal himself to his people in history? (2) How does God want us to respond to him?