

Joshua
Last Words
Joshua 23

A person's last words are typically their most significant and the most important to remember. We see this in the Bible—the last words of Jacob, Moses, David, and especially, Jesus.

Last words matter, and in the final two chapters of **Joshua**, we have Joshua's farewell discourse, given in two parts—chapter 24, to all Israel, and chapter 23 to Israel's leaders.

vv. 1-2 “a long time afterward” - Most likely, a long time after Joshua released the 2 ½ tribes to return east of the Jordan.

Joshua is, now, “old and well advanced in years.” He died at the age of 110 (**24:29**), some 20 to 30 years after Israel entered the land.

“rest” Having given Israel the land, Yahweh gave his people rest, but the question is, how will Israel live in this rest? What will be its fruit?

In many ways, the dangers associated with the days of peace Israel is now enjoying will be even more challenging than what they faced during the years of conquest. (Note: Billy Graham - “The most difficult place on earth to follow Jesus is America,” because of all of the wealth, power, and pleasure we enjoy in this great land..

Joshua's last words to Israel's leaders can be divided into three major parts—**vv. 3–8, 9–13, and 14–16**. In each of these 3 parts, he repeats his main idea—**GOD IS SO GOOD**.

ALWAYS REMEMBER; NEVER FORGET WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU. (vv. 3-8)

Joshua begins by looking back in grateful praise for what God has done, but as he develops his message, each successive movement of thought delivers increasingly strong warnings about the dangers in the coming days.

He challenges the leaders to reflect on their common experience of God's goodness, to remember the amazing things Yahweh has done on their behalf in giving them this land.

Psalm 103:2 “Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

Once we lose sight of God's good and gracious hand in our lives, we become sitting ducks to temptation and sin. (e.g., Eve in **Genesis 3**)

Joshua repeats the word “good” 4 times in his message. Twice he speaks of the “good promises Yahweh your Elohim gave you” (**vv. 14–15**), and twice he speaks of the “good land he has given you” (**vv. 15–16**).

We follow and obey God, because God is so good, and his way is so good.

God doesn't need our praise. We need to praise God, not only because God is worthy of all praise, but as image bearers of God, created to reflect his glory, praising God is primal to our very existence. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

We can rejoice, even in life's present pain and loss, because *we know* our Father in heaven is infinitely good, and he is at work in our pain to mature us and make us more like Jesus.

v. 3 “Yahweh our Elohim fought for us.”

v. 5 “Yahweh your Elohim will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as Yahweh your Elohim promised you.”

Philippians 1:6: *He who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*—the same timeless truth for us that Joshua shared with Israel's leaders that day.

Going forward, the challenges will be greater, but Yahweh's yoke won't get heavier. **Verse 10** - God's people are more than overcomers (cp. **Romans 8:37**), because “*It is Yahweh your Elohim who fights for you, just as he promised.*”

NOTE: *Yahweh your Elohim* occurs 13 times in 16 verses! *Yahweh* occurs, an additional 4 times. That kind of repetition cannot be ignored!

See **Joshua 3** “Dip in the Brink” and from the **Behold Your God** series, “The First Name of God” and “The Personal Name of God” – pt. 1) in our sermon library at www.fbceugene.com.

Elohim reveals our God as the oath-making Creator God, who, before he even spoke creation into existence, covenanted within his tri-unity, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to save mankind and creation through the Son becoming a man and dying for our sin (**Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20-21**).

Yahweh is God's personal name and it reveals that he is intimately, faithfully and uniquely engaged in each of our lives as the promise-keeping God.

Romans 8:31 “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Joshua doesn’t simply emphasize Yahweh Elohim’s power (he is fully able) but especially his promise (he is fully committed).

Joshua urges us, as a regular discipline, to always remember and never forget all we have experienced of God’s rich mercy and grace in our salvation.

Joshua’s call is for us to find fresh courage and focus from the past, in order to keep trusting and obeying the God of battles already won to face battles yet to come.

v. 7 Joshua wants these leaders to understand, not only the danger they will face, but also how stealthily and imperceptibly it can destroy them.

Sin slow-cooks us. Avoiding sin’s slow cook is a decision we must make every day.

If Israel fails to be a light to the nations, and instead becomes like the nations, she will no longer serve as God’s agency to reach the nations. (Note Jesus’ warning to the churches of Asia Minor in **Revelation 2-3**.)

We see our own New Testament reflection in the mirror of Israel’s Old Testament story.

DON’T TURN BACK AND LOSE OUT ON GOD’S BEST FOR YOU. (vv. 9-13)

v. 12 Joshua’s warning of compromising with the Canaanites keys off the phrase “*turn back*,” a deliberate recall of Israel’s history after the Exodus.

Later, in **24:14**, we learn that Egyptian idols could still be found in Jewish tents!

To turn back is to turn away from Yahweh.

v. 13. All that Yahweh planned to do for Israel would be suspended.

1 Corinthians 9:27 *I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*—a sobering truth repeated again and again in the NT.

Joshua’s words of warning to Israel are echoed to us by Jesus (**Matthew 16:24-27**), Paul (**1 Corinthians 3:10-15**; **2 Corinthians 5:10-11**; **Romans 8:17**), Peter (**2 Peter 1:3-11**), and John (**1 John 2:28**) in the New Testament.

GOD IS PERFECTLY FAITHFUL TO YOU. (vv. 14-16)

v. 14 “*Not one word has failed of all the good things that Yahweh your Elohim promised concerning you.*”

Joshua turns to the leaders and, in essence, says, “You know, in your heart of hearts, that Yahweh has never let you down, never reneged on a single promise he’s made to you, never failed to meet all your actual needs. He is utterly dependable!”

Joshua’s point is historical, but it’s enormously motivational. The lessons learned in the conquest are to have a profound and lasting impact on their conduct going forward.

APPLICATION

Joshua’s ancient last words have enormous relevance for us, today. He underscores for us three great positives:

- **v. 6** “*Be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left.*” (cf. **1:7**)

We are under a New Covenant that calls us to an even higher standard of obedience—to live, love, and lead like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in each one of us.

- **v. 8** “*You shall cling to Yahweh your Elohim, just as you have done to this day.*”

“cling” - The strongest adhesive in the Hebrew Bible. It’s used in **Genesis 2:24** to describe marriage.

Clinging to Yahweh our Elohim is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples in **John 15:5** “*Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*”

- **v. 11** “*Be very careful, therefore, to love Yahweh your Elohim.*”

“be very careful” - Loving God requires focused attention. It doesn’t happen automatically. (cf. **Deuteronomy 6:5**; **Matthew 22:37-38**)

1 John 4:9, 19 “*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him...We love because he first loved us.*”

The question for us is the same question before Israel in **Joshua 23**. How will we live in this rest? What will be its fruit? How well do we remember how good God has been and continues to be to us? And in light of God's goodness, how careful are we to love Yahweh our Elohim with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind?

COMMUNION

—remembering Jesus for all he has done for us—