

A Renewed Covenant

Devotional Reading: [Jeremiah 31:27–34](#)

Background Scripture: [Deuteronomy 29:1–20](#); [Joshua 23–24](#)

[Joshua 24:18–27](#)

¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.”

¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

²³ “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”

²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

²⁷ “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”



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Key Text

“Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”—Joshua 24:14b

Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Joshua's warning and witness to Israel.
2. Compare the covenant commitments made in [Deuteronomy 29:1–20](#) and [Joshua 24:18–27](#).
3. Make a plan to memorialize their commitment to God.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. Picking and Choosing

B. Lesson Context

I. He Is Our God (Joshua 24:18–24)

A. Divine Delivery (v. 18)

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B. Word of Warning (vv. 19–20)

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Idolaters Anonymous?

II. We Give Our Witness (Joshua 24:25–27)

A. Promise of Obedience (v. 25)

B. Stone of Accountability (vv. 26–27)

Conclusion

A. We Will Serve the Lord

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Amorites *Am-uh-rites*

Baal *Bay-ul*

Canaanite *Kay-nu-**nite***

Ebal *Ee-bull*

Gerizim *Gair-ih-zeem or Guh-rye-zim*

Shechem *Shee-kem or Shek-em*

Sihon *Sigh-hun*

Introduction

A. Picking and Choosing

“We go to the foreign doctors to cure our malaria,” the refugees told the mission staff. “But we go to the witch doctors if we have hepatitis or other problems.”

Having access to modern health care was new to these North African refugees. It came about after they had walked for days, fleeing war in their homeland. In the refugee camp, several aid organizations operated medical clinics. The refugees would let the foreign doctors diagnose them and give them medicine for certain health issues. Some refugees would then pay their traditional healers who practiced witchcraft for certain other ailments.

With options available, the refugees quickly tabulated the perceived success rate of each treatment option. Before long, they had decided under what circumstances they would go to the witch doctors or the foreign doctors.

The Israelites under Joshua may have been tempted to employ similar syncretic tactics. “The God of Abraham is good at wars, but Baal is good at crops,” they might decide. They could pick and choose which deity—real or imagined—to follow when.

But Joshua would have none of it. In his later years, Joshua forced them to choose. Would they serve God with all their hearts or not?

B. Lesson Context

By the time of the events in today’s lesson, the Israelites had defeated various coalitions of Canaanite kings ([Joshua 10:28–12:24](#)). However, some parts of the land remained unconquered ([13:1–5](#)). Despite this fact, the Lord instructed Joshua to divide the land among the tribes of Israel ([13:8–19:51](#)). By allocating the land at this point in time, Joshua demonstrated his trust that God would continue to drive out the other nations and be faithful to his promises to the Israelites (see [23:4–5](#)).

The latter half of the book of Joshua depicts his having become elderly ([Joshua 13:1; 23:1](#)). We estimate that Joshua was near the age of 85 ([14:10](#)). The land and the people were in a season of peace. The elderly leader gathered the leaders of Israel for what some see as a final address. It may not have been all that “final” since Joshua lives to be age 110 ([24:29](#))! In any case, this speech took place at Shechem in the central hill country of Palestine, situated between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (compare [Deuteronomy 27:11–13; Joshua 8:30](#)).

In this address, Joshua recounted the history of God’s provision, the Lord’s faithfulness, their deliverance from Egypt, and, ultimately, their victories in Canaan ([Joshua 24:1–13](#)). This history lesson had a point: it encouraged the Israelites to revere God as their only Lord ([24:14](#)). The address culminated in a covenant renewal ceremony, referring to the covenant established at Sinai ([Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy 5–6](#)).

I. He Is Our God ([Joshua 24:18–24](#))

A. Divine Delivery (v. [18](#))

18. “And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in

the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.”

Seven groups of people are acknowledged to be foes to overcome in the conquest of the promised land (see the complete listing in [Deuteronomy 7:1](#); [Joshua 3:10](#); [24:11](#)). Of these, *the Amorites* seem to be the most troublesome. And the book of Joshua uses the word *Amorites* more than any other book of the Bible.

During the time of the conquest, Amorites lived both east and west of the Jordan River. Before Joshua led the Israelites across that river to attack Jericho, Moses had led the Israelites to defeat two prominent Amorite kings, namely Sihon and Og ([Numbers 21:21–35](#); compare [Joshua 2:10](#)). However, even after that conquest was complete, there were five more Amorite kings to be defeated, west of the Jordan ([10:1–27](#)). Credit to *the Lord* for these victories predominates those accounts, as it does here. Sadly, Amorite spiritual pollution remains in parts of the land, posing a threat to Israel’s allegiance to God ([Judges 6:10](#)).

The Israelites recognize the miraculous works of the Lord as a demonstration of his power. They follow Joshua’s example and commit to loyal obedience to the most powerful *Lord* and *God* (see [Joshua 24:15](#)).

Spiritual Lessons in Soapy Water

One of my earliest memories of doing household chores dates back to when I was three years old. I recall standing on a chair in the kitchen, covered in soapy water, helping my mother wash the dishes in the sink. Over the years, my responsibilities expanded, and my mother began asking me to take on more of the household chores. She taught me the importance of completing the work with a happy, thankful heart.

However, as I entered my preteen years, I began to notice that I did not *feel* happy or thankful while doing chores. I frequently felt like grumbling or complaining instead. My negative attitude led to many arguments between my mother and me. These continued until I understood that maturing meant obeying my mother without complaining. Once I realized this, I made a greater effort to follow her requests and do what she asked.

In the presence of Joshua, the Israelites pledged to serve the Lord and obey his voice. This generation of Israelites had put aside the grumbling tendencies of earlier generations. Having witnessed the Lord’s provision of land, the attitudes of this generation changed, and they committed to obeying the Lord.

Are you prone to grumbling before the Lord? If so, what steps can you take to choose to trust and obey?

—KS

B. Word of Warning (vv. 19–20)

19a. Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD.

With the wisdom of his many years, elderly *Joshua* senses that *the people* of Israel do not fully grasp the nature of their promise. His response may seem harsh or out of place, but his warning that they

are not able to serve the Lord stems from his experience with them. Although they commit themselves to obedience to the Lord (example: [Exodus 24:3, 7](#)), their history shows that such commitment tends to be temporary (example: [32:1–6](#)). Therefore, Joshua seems rightly concerned that while the Israelites have the capacity to serve the Lord in obedience, their willingness to do so may diminish.

Joshua challenges the Israelites to deepen their devotion. Now is the time to make their faith solely in the one true God.

19b. “He is a holy God;

Joshua’s warning to the people comes from his knowledge of God’s distinct nature as contrasted with the pagan gods of the conquered nations. The Bible often stresses God’s unique holiness in different ways. One way is in reference to his transcendent nature; he alone stands apart from creation in the very essence of his being ([1 Samuel 2:2](#); [Revelation 15:4](#); etc.).

Another way to understand God’s holiness is to understand it in terms of his complete separation from sin. God’s people in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras are to strive for such holiness themselves ([Leviticus 11:44–45](#); [19:2](#); quoted in [1 Peter 1:15–16](#)).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to pursue holiness in light of your identity as one who belongs to a holy God?

Digging Deeper

What obstacles do you face in striving for holiness, and how can Scripture, prayer, and accountability help you overcome them?

19c. “he is a jealous God.

The Old Testament describes the Lord as *a jealous God* in several other places ([Exodus 20:5](#); [34:14](#); [Deuteronomy 4:24](#); [5:9](#); [6:15](#); etc.). We may usually think of the words *jealous* and *jealousy* in negative terms, as in being envious of someone else and coveting what they have. But in God’s self-description, the words refer to being intolerant of rivals (compare [32:15–16](#)). The Israelites would enjoy the blessings of the Lord so long as they remained faithful to him and him alone ([Exodus 20:6](#)).

19d. “He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.

This warning pertains to the conditions in the Lord’s covenant with Israel. If the Israelites fail to comply with these conditions, the Lord will not simply forgive them without consequence. Instead, he will hold them accountable for their *rebellion* and *sins* (see [Exodus 34:7](#); [Deuteronomy 28:15–68](#); [Joshua 23:16](#)).

20. “If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

The ultimate purpose for God’s setting apart the promised land was to prepare the way for the Messiah ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#), quoted in [Acts 3:19–23](#)). In receiving the land, the ancient Israelites were to realize the necessity to live lives of holiness ([Leviticus 20:24, 26](#)). Such lives would reflect their covenant relationship with the Lord ([11:44–45](#); [Deuteronomy 7:6–11](#)).

Should they *forsake the Lord*, abandoning their covenant responsibilities and turning to the *foreign gods* of the surrounding nations, they would sever the very relationship that was to define them

(Deuteronomy 8:19–20). Pagan gods might seem appealing, offering the illusion of benefits such as fertile crops, abundant families, or national safety. However, such idolatry would defile the Israelites’ covenant with the Lord as it would violate his explicit command to worship him alone (Exodus 20:3–5, 23; Deuteronomy 6:14–15).

If the Israelites choose to worship these pagan gods, the Lord *will turn and bring disaster* with punishment and take away the *good* blessings that he has given them (Joshua 23:15; Deuteronomy 28:64). Such curses will include exile and dispersion among the nations (28:63).

C. Sworn to Serve (vv. 21–24)

21. But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

In response to Joshua’s challenge, *the people* of Israel reaffirm their commitment to *the Lord*. The scene is reminiscent of an important event that occurred at Mount Sinai several decades earlier. There, the Lord established his covenant with the Israelites. During that occurrence, Moses read the book of the covenant to them, and they responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey” (Exodus 24:7).

Another parallel is the previous covenant renewal ceremony at Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30–35) as previously commanded by Moses (Deuteronomy 11:26–32; 27:12–26). Joshua was likely present at these two events, so he has heard the repeated promises of the people!

22. Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.” “Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

The concept of being a witness occurs more than one hundred times in the Old and New Testaments together. Many things are said to serve as witnesses against the peoples, including “the heavens and the earth” (Deuteronomy 30:19), the “Book of the Law” (31:26), a “stone” (Joshua 24:27, below), and the Lord himself (Jeremiah 42:5). The concept is so vital that in several places Scripture points out the impact, motives, or destiny of false witnesses (examples: Deuteronomy 19:17–21; Proverbs 19:9; Acts 6:12–14; 1 Corinthians 15:13–17).

In this case, Joshua does not call upon an external witness. Instead, he appoints the people themselves as *witnesses against* their own testimony. If they turn away from the Lord and start worshiping other gods, they will be their own accusers. As such, they will face the consequences that Joshua stated in Joshua 24:20, above. The people agree to the stated terms, declaring, “Yes, we are witnesses.”

23a. “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you

Joshua’s command reveals that idolatry is still present among the Israelites, and its continued presence poses a serious threat to their spiritual health. This had been an issue in the past and continues to be an enduring problem, given how the Old Testament people were inclined to follow *foreign gods* (here and Genesis 35:2, 4; Deuteronomy 31:16; 32:16; Joshua 24:20; Judges 10:16; 1 Samuel 7:3; 2 Chronicles 33:15; Jeremiah 5:19; etc.).

What Do You Think?

What are the false gods of contemporary culture that compete for our loyalty to the Lord?

Digging Deeper

What practices help believers resist the temptation to follow these gods?

23b. “and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

The negative thing to stop doing now gives way to the positive thing to start doing. The necessity of properly attuned hearts is also expressed in [1 Kings 8:58](#) and [Psalm 119:36](#). This refers to a person’s total submission to the authority and guidance of *the Lord, the God of Israel*.

What Do You Think?

Why is it sometimes difficult to fully surrender one’s heart to God, even after professing faith in him?

Digging Deeper

What habits and practices help you soften your heart more fully to God?

Idolaters Anonymous?

Both men admitted to being hopeless drunks. So they set a goal to stay sober and help others overcome addiction to alcohol. Thus was born Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), founded in 1935 by two alcoholics—one a New York stockbroker, the other an Ohio surgeon. Today, there are over two million AA members in about 180 countries.

The success of AA has led to the founding of other “anonymous” groups. These groups are for drug addicts, compulsive shoppers, and even those who cannot seem to control their use of profanity! The literature of these “anonymous” groups often recognizes that the source of the cure is a higher power. That may be a little vague for those who think the reference should be specifically to God.

But what if you could start a movement that would head off alcoholism before it even got started in a person? It would not be far off the mark to state that God was, in effect, trying to start an “Idolaters Anonymous” movement to prevent idolatry before it could get a toehold. God knew the enticing power that idolatry would have on the Israelites. God also knows the seductive power of idols yet today. Such idols need not be of a physical variety, as we see in [1 Kings 12:28–30](#) and [Isaiah 44:12–20](#). The more dangerous and challenging to recognize are idols of the heart ([Ezekiel 14:3–4, 7](#)). What early warning system can you put in place to avoid this sin?

—CRB

24. And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”

This is the third time *the people* express the desire to *serve the Lord* (compare [Joshua 24:18, 21](#), above). It is easy to give allegiance to the Lord as one goes along with a crowd of people who are doing so. But it is much more challenging to translate that pledge into everyday actions and choices that align with that professed allegiance.

II. We Give Our Witness

(Joshua 24:25–27)

A. Promise of Obedience (v. 25)

25. On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws.

At *Shechem* (see [Lesson Context](#)), the Israelites have committed three times to serve the Lord and have agreed to bear witness against themselves should they fail to uphold this commitment. *Joshua* holds them accountable to these promises. He does so by reaffirming the earlier *covenant* made at Mount Sinai during the leadership of Moses ([Exodus 19–24](#)). That initial covenant was first reaffirmed as the Israelites prepared to enter the promised land ([Deuteronomy 29](#)). Now that they have settled in the land, Joshua leads them in renewing the covenant, highlighting the continuity in their relationship with the Lord across the generations.

The text does not provide details regarding the specific content of the *decrees* and *laws*. The two underlying Hebrew words occur in the Old Testament several dozen times ([Exodus 15:25](#); [1 Samuel 30:25](#); [Ezra 7:10](#); [Psalm 81:4](#); etc.). Joshua is not modifying or changing God’s earlier covenant law. Instead, he calls the people to recommit to what has already been promised—to serve and worship the Lord God alone.

What Do You Think?

How can we make our faith commitments more intentional and accountable in public and private ways?

Digging Deeper

In what ways might you create a physical memorial to the faithfulness of God and your commitment to him?

B. Stone of Accountability (vv. 26–27)

26a. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God.

Scripture rarely uses the description *the Book of the Law of God* ([Nehemiah 8:8, 18; 9:3](#)). In those instances, it may refer to the entirety of the Law of Moses. Another possibility is that it is an early form of the book of Deuteronomy (compare [Joshua 1:8; 23:6](#)). A third possibility is that it is a distinct document recording God’s historical dealings with the Israelites. In either case, by writing *these things* in a book, future generations of Israelites will have a record of the promises their ancestors made to worship and obey God alone.

26b. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

Joshua sets up *a large stone* as a physical reminder of the people’s promises to the Lord. This act follows the tradition of establishing physical memorials. These often mark significant encounters with the Lord (compare [Genesis 28:18–22](#); [Joshua 4:1–9](#); see [Lesson 2](#)).

Since the time of Abraham, large *oak* trees have been present in Shechem ([Genesis 12:6; 35:4](#)). Ancient people often viewed groves of trees as sanctuaries where gods resided. However, in this

instance, *the holy place of the Lord* likely refers to the tabernacle that had been erected near a specific oak tree. The stone will be a silent but enduring witness to the covenant promises the Israelites reaffirmed.

What Do You Think?

What visible or tangible spiritual reminders have helped anchor your journey of faith?

Digging Deeper

How will you share these reminders with others?

27. “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

These are the last recorded words of Joshua before his death at age 110 ([Joshua 24:29](#); [Judges 2:8](#)). His declaration foreshadows the sobering realities that the Israelites will face. They would experience prosperity and peace due to their obedience to the Lord ([Joshua 24:31](#); [Judges 2:6](#)). However, their commitment is short-lived. Even though they had sworn loyalty to *the Lord ... God*, they will soon be seduced by the worship of pagan gods. They will break their covenant promises, fail to worship the Lord God, and deny him as God ([2:6–13](#); see [Lesson 6](#)).

As promising as the conclusion to the book of Joshua is, the conclusion to the book of Judges is disheartening: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” ([Judges 21:25](#)). For the most part, the Israelites refuse to obey the Lord and accept the blessings.

Conclusion

A. We Will Serve the Lord

Notably, the names *Joshua* and *Jesus* come from the same Hebrew verb, meaning “to save.” Joshua brought the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan. Jesus, the “pioneer of [our] salvation” ([Hebrews 2:10](#)), leads us toward our promised land of eternal life with God. And as one ponders Joshua’s words and the commitment to the Lord that he called for, it is not difficult to recognize similarities to Jesus’ teaching about what is required to be his disciple ([Luke 14:25–33](#)).

For us to express commitment to serving God means we will honor Jesus as Lord and demonstrate that commitment by serving him faithfully. Like Joshua’s audience, we too must reject the “gods” that threaten to undermine that commitment. Those gods to us are not likely to be statues or images of pagan deities but rather devotion to pursuits—status, wealth, prestige, and comfort—that undermine our commitment to the Lord. We are all guilty of that at times. How do we recognize those times?

B. Prayer

Lord God, you have shown us mercy and revealed your salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. Forgive us for the times we have failed to honor you as our sovereign Lord and God. Expose the false gods that threaten to undermine our commitment to you. Help us be attentive to the Holy Spirit’s

leading to incline our hearts toward you alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Choose this day who you will serve.



Visual for [Lesson 5](#). Display this visual at the close of class as you ask volunteers to share how they put God first.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Lead a whole-class discussion about modern covenants and agreements. Begin the conversation by

asking the following questions: 1—What are some types of modern covenants or agreements? (Note: the marriage covenant is one of the most common examples of a modern covenant. Other examples of agreements include political treaties, non-disclosure agreements, union contracts, or ordination vows.) 2—What terms might be included in these covenants or agreements? 3—What are the possible consequences of breaking these terms?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Can I Get a Witness?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in small groups of two or three.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “The Old Testament includes many stories of covenants and agreements. Sometimes, people needed reminders of the promises they had already made. In today’s study, we’ll examine how Joshua reminded the people of one such covenant and renewed its stipulations.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: **Faithful Followers Group** (vv. 18–21), **Witnessing Worshipers Group** (vv. 22–24), and **Covenant Keepers Group** (vv. 25–27). Write the following headers and prompts on the board:

***Observe:** Read through [Joshua 24:18–27](#) and focus on your group’s assigned verses. What words and details in those verses stand out to the group?*

***Explore:** Discuss the significance of your assigned verses within the context of the whole passage.*

***Ask:** What question(s) do you have regarding the content in your assigned verses?*

***Reflect:** What do the passage and the assigned verses teach you about the Lord and your walk with him?*

Ask learners to silently read and discuss the prompts. Distribute a sheet of paper and pen to a volunteer from each group. Ask them to write their group’s responses to each prompt.

After the allotted time, reconvene the class and invite a volunteer from each group to share a summary of their findings. Record on the board responses related to the themes of covenant, witness, and devotion to the Lord.

Next, invite participants to silently read [Deuteronomy 29](#) and compare the commitments that Moses commanded with those that Joshua commanded in the lesson text. Bring the class back together to discuss their conclusions.

Into Life

Lead into the activity by saying, “God prioritizes his relationship with his people, believers in Christ Jesus. God has invited us into a new covenant with him through Christ Jesus. Therefore, God asks us to commit to following him and not be distracted by other ‘lesser gods.’”

Encourage participants to work with a partner to brainstorm potential distractions that prevent them from remembering their commitment to God. Write their responses in one column on the

board. Ask the pairs to brainstorm ways to overcome those distractions and write those ideas in a second column. Finally, invite the pairs to think of ways to memorialize their commitment to the Lord and write those responses in a third column.

Afterward, invite participants to pray for their partner to encourage them to remember their commitment to the Lord in the upcoming week.

Option. Distribute copies of the “My Stone, My Commitment” exercise from the activity page. Invite participants to complete the exercise at home during the upcoming week. To encourage participation, inform them that time will be allotted at the beginning of the next class period for volunteers to share what they wrote.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(October 4—A Renewed Covenant\)](#)
