

Joshua's Final Acts: Part 1
The gathering of the people.
Joshua 24:1-13
Sunday evening, October 31, 2010.

I. The significance of this gathering.

The gathering spoken of in this chapter appears to have been separate from the one described in the previous chapter. There may have been meetings of this sort from time to time with the aged leader of Israel in the final years of his life. The meeting described for us in this chapter would be the final one, and it would result in an act of covenant renewal on the part of the people.

Some observations and applications:

- A. Joshua stayed involved in the life of the nation long after he retired from his life work of bringing Israel into the possession of the Promised Land.
- B. As long as the Lord gives us life and breath there is work for us to do on behalf of the Lord and His Bride, the Church.
- C. The great burden and consuming concern for Joshua seems to have been his knowledge of the fickleness of human nature and the propensity it has for leaving the side of the Lord, to no longer walk with Him.
- D. We see in these two final chapters how Joshua used the final years of his life to meet with the nation from time to time to speak to them of the Lord and His mercies, but also the consequences of leaving His side.
- E. Let us learn from Joshua in this matter and, as long as the Lord gives us life and breath, to speak of His mercies, but also the consequences of leaving His side.

II. Review of Israel's history.

- A. We see here how often the Scriptures review the history of God's people and His dealings with them. This morning we saw how the Apostle Paul made use of this approach in preaching to the Jewish people in the synagogue in Antioch, Acts 13. Many of the Psalms do the same thing, and so do the Prophets of Israel. Let us therefore not under-estimate the importance of history, and let us give ourselves to knowing and understanding the history of God's covenant people.
- B. Your fathers...
 1. Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor (who was the father of Rebekah, Isaac's wife, and grandfather to Rachel and Leah who became the wives of Jacob), served other gods when they lived on the other side of the Euphrates River. It appears that the knowledge of the true God had been preserved in the family of Terah, but, as in the case of Nahor, they served other gods besides according to the custom of their time and place.
They practiced syncretism, or the serving of several gods at the same time. Syncretism runs deep in our hearts by nature; we are not free from it ourselves, although we are less obvious about it. Hence the commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me."
So Rachel and Leah brought their household gods with them when they left Mesopotamia Gen 31:34, and Jacob's sons served many other deities besides the Lord as appears from passages like Gen 35:1-5.

2. So the Lord separated Abraham from Terah and Nahor that He might have him for himself. And he separated Esau from Jacob, and gave Esau the land of Edom so that the Lord might have Jacob and his descendants for Himself.
3. Jacob and his descendants go down into Egypt, where the Lord preserves them wonderfully as a separate people. First this was because they were shepherds; a people despised by the Egyptians; then it was through the estate of slavery. All was to the effect that the Lord might have them to Himself as a separate people, a people He would claim at the time of the Exodus.
4. The Lord still desires to have His people as a separate people; a people set apart to Him. Your heart can never be free and at home, at rest and at peace, until you own that truth and play that part.
5. We see some of truths worked out in this history.
 - We see election and predestination at work here. It was God who chose and who separated. "I took your father Abraham..." Joshua 24:3.
 - We see providence at work here. God superintending the unfolding of history; God calling out, separating and preserving a people to Himself. The rest of Scripture and sacred history confirms that process, and God still today continues that work, having given it over into the capable hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will also finish it.

III. Even the realm of nature made serviceable to God's people.

- A. Joshua makes mention of an event not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and it has been the subject of all kinds of speculation on the part of many, and leading to a great many fanciful ideas. Joshua speaks of an event where the Lord sent "the hornet" before His people, who drove out the Canaanite people and two kings of the Amorites, so that Israel had the victory, but not by sword and bow. Joshua 24:12.
- B. It is best to take these words in their plain and ordinary sense. This would go along with other phenomena recorded in Joshua during this time period.
 1. So the Jordan stopped the flow of her water and let Israel pass into the land on dry ground.
 2. So the sun was made to stand still for Israel to finish the battle which required more time and was threatened to be cut short by the setting sun.
 3. So on that same day the Lord rained large hailstones from heaven, killing more Amorites with the hailstones than Israel did with the sword.
 4. So it seems that the Lord employed swarms of hornets to drive the Canaanites from an area of the land so as to give it to His people.
- C. We see then from passages such as reviewed here from the book of Joshua that nature does not function autonomously. The laws of nature are God's ordinary way of administering the universe, but He is free to deviate from them at any time. We call such occurrences miracles.
- D. How good and comforting to know that the "laws of nature" are not mere cold hard realities of our universe, but that they are the personal ways of God administering the created order. And that He is free, and will not hesitate to depart from them when the circumstances require it.