

The Book of Joshua

Lesson 4

Covenant Loyalty

Lesson Guide



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CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE	1
NOTES.....	2
I. INTRODUCTION (0:20).....	2
II. COVENANT WARNINGS, 23:1-16 (3:12).....	2
A. Structure and Content (4:21)	2
1. Joshua's Summons, 23:1-2a (5:19)	2
2. Joshua's Speech, 23:2b-16 (7:38).....	3
B. Original Meaning (19:42).....	5
1. Divine Authority (20:40)	5
2. God's Covenant (21:58)	5
3. Standard of Moses' Law (23:02)	5
4. God's Supernatural Power (24:12).....	6
5. All Israel (26:00)	6
III. COVENANT RENEWAL, 24:1-28 (27:58).....	6
A. Structure and Content (28:57)	7
1. Summons, 24:1 (30:05)	7
2. Speech & Responses, 24:2-24 (31:49)	7
3. Ratification Ceremony, 24:25-27 (40:42)	9
4. Dismissal, 24:28 (42:25).....	10
5. Afterword, 24:29-33	10
B. Original Meaning (43:31).....	10
1. Divine Authority (45:42)	10
2. God's Covenant (47:03)	11
3. Standard of Moses' Law (48:17)	11
4. God's Supernatural Power (49:20).....	11
5. All Israel (52:16)	12
IV. CHRISTIAN APPLICATION (53:05)	12
A. Inauguration (1:00:00).....	13
B. Continuation (1:05:56)	15
C. Consummation (1:10:30).....	17
V. CONCLUSION (1:13:50).....	18
REVIEW QUESTIONS	19
APPLICATION QUESTIONS	23
GLOSSARY	24

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

The third and final division of Joshua called Israel to be faithful to the terms of their covenant with God.

The book of Joshua was written about Israel's victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty in Joshua's day to address similar challenges facing later generations.

II. Covenant Warnings, 23:1-16 (3:12)

A. Structure and Content (4:21)

Joshua held an assembly at Shiloh in Ephraim.

1. Joshua's Summons, 23:1-2a (5:19)

This assembly was far more significant than Joshua's earlier gatherings:

- Joshua was "old and well advanced in years," and "about to go the way of all the earth" (23:1-2, 14).
- "Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers" (23:2).

2. Joshua's Speech, 23:2b-16 (7:38)

Joshua's speech warned Israel against violating God's covenant.

Divine covenants reveal the central administrative policies that God established for his kingdom:

- divine benevolence – God's kindness that both initiates and sustains all of his covenants
- human loyalty – our grateful response to God's benevolence
- consequences of blessings and curses – blessings for loyalty and curses for disloyalty

Joshua's speech refers directly to all three covenant dynamics, but, primarily warns about the curses for flagrant disloyalty to God.

Joshua's speech: first segment, 23:2b-8 (12:13)

- God's benevolence –
 - "... the Lord your God ... fought for you" (23:3)
 - God "allotted ... as an inheritance ... those nations that remain" (23:4)

- Israel's loyalty –

Joshua called for Israel to:

- "... do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses" (23:6)
- avoid Canaanite idolatry and the corrupt practices of Canaan's idolatrous societies (23:7)
- "... cling to the Lord your God" (23:8)

Joshua's speech: second segment, 23:9-13 (14:10)

- God's benevolence –
 - “The Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations” (23:9).
 - “It is the Lord your God who fights for you” (23:10).
- Israel's loyalty –
 - Joshua exhorted Israel to “love the Lord your God” (23:11; cf., Deuteronomy 6:5).
- Consequences of curses –
 - “... if you ... cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you ... God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you ... until you perish from off this good ground” (23:12, 13).

Joshua's speech: third segment, 23:14-16 (16:39)

- God's benevolence –
 - “Not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you” (23:14).
- Consequences of curses –
 - God will bring on you “all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land” (23:15; cf., Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4; 28).
 - Joshua didn't threaten these consequences for small failures; the term *abar* (אַבַּר), or “transgress,” was reserved for serious, treasonous offenses, such as idolatry (Joshua 7:10, 15; 23:16).

B. Original Meaning (19:42)

The author of Joshua wove his five main themes into his covenant warnings:

1. Divine Authority (20:40)

In Joshua's summons, divine authority was behind the assembly:

- Joshua summoned the people.
- God had authorized Joshua as Moses' authoritative successor.

2. God's Covenant (21:58)

The warnings in Joshua's speech are devoted to the theme of God's covenant:

- Cisjordan was Israel's "inheritance" – *nachalah* (נַחֲלָה) – land promised by oath, or covenant, to the patriarchs (23:4; cf., Genesis 15:18).
- Joshua warned Israel not to "transgress the covenant of the Lord your God" (23:16).

3. Standard of Moses' Law (23:02)

Joshua's covenant warnings highlighted the standard of Moses' law:

- Israel was to "do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses" (23:6).
- Joshua repeated Moses' command to "love the Lord your God" (23:11; cf., Deuteronomy 6:5).
- Israel was not to "mix with these nations" and not to worship their gods (23:7, 8, 12; cf., Deuteronomy 7:3; 10:20).

4. God's Supernatural Power (24:12)

The chapter detailing Joshua's covenant warnings draws attention to God's supernatural power:

- In Joshua's summons we learn that, "The Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies" (23:1).
- Joshua reminded Israel several times that the Lord had fought for them (23:3, 5, 9, 10).
- Joshua referred to God's supernatural power in the judgment against Israel (23:15, 16).

5. All Israel (26:00)

Joshua's covenant warnings stressed the participation of all Israel:

- Joshua assembled all Israel (23:2).
- Joshua's warnings against violating the covenant applied to all of God's people.

III. Covenant Renewal, 24:1-28 (27:58)

Joshua held a second assembly where the Israelites recommitted themselves to keeping covenant with God.

A. Structure and Content (28:57)

Israel assembled in Shechem, a special sacred place for Israel. It was:

- the first site where Abraham built an altar to God in the Promised Land (Genesis 12:7).
- near Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal where Moses commanded Israel to renew their covenant with God (Deuteronomy 11; 27).
- where Joshua's service as the leader of Israel culminated.

1. Summons, 24:1 (30:05)

- Joshua brought together all the tribes of Israel and their leaders.
- Joshua and Israel assembled before the visible glory of God at the tabernacle (cf., Exodus 19–24).

2. Speech & Responses, 24:2-24 (31:49)

As in his previous speech, Joshua drew attention to the dynamics of God's covenant, but here we also learn how Israel responded.

a. Divine benevolence, 24:2-13 (32:38)

The first segment of this speech is a lengthy rehearsal of divine benevolence:

- Some 18 times God declared what he had done for Israel using the first-person pronoun "I."

- God rehearsed his benevolences to Israel over three periods of history:
 - the period of Israel’s patriarchs (24:3, 4)
 - the time of Moses (24:5-10)
 - the days of Joshua (24:11-13):

In the second segment of his speech, Joshua called for loyalty and warned of consequences for failure, and the people responded.

b. First Call and Response, 24:14-18 (36:13)

Joshua exhorted the Israelites to:

- “fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness” (24:14)
- “put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt” (24:14)
- “choose this day whom you will serve” (24:15)

Joshua set the example saying, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (24:15).

Israel responded positively by expressing their commitment to serve God (24:16-18).

c. Second Call and Response, 24:19-22 (37:42)

Joshua challenged the assembly:

- “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins” (24:19).
- Israel could not recommit to serving God and receiving God’s blessings until they removed their idols.
- Continuing to serve idols would bring God’s wrath on them (24:20).

The people responded, “No ... we will serve the Lord” (24:21).

d. Third Call and Response, 24:23-24 (39:00)

Joshua reaffirmed that the people must put away their idols and turn to the Lord (24:23).

Israel replied, “The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey” (24:24).

3. Ratification Ceremony, 24:25-27 (40:42)

To ratify Israel’s new-found commitment to God:

- “Joshua made a covenant with the people ... and put in place statutes and rules for them” (24:25).

- Joshua erected “a large stone ... under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord” (24:26).
 - Abraham built his first altar under the great tree of Moreh at Shechem (Genesis 12:6).
 - Stones were often used for commemoration in the book of Joshua (4:7; 22:34; 24:27).

4. Dismissal, 24:28 (42:25)

The account of Israel’s covenant renewal closes as “Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance” (24:28).

5. Afterword, 24:29-33

“Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua” (24:31).

B. Original Meaning (43:31)

The original audience needed to remember God’s many kindnesses and renew their covenant with him, just as Israel had done in Joshua’s day.

1. Divine Authority (45:42)

Divine authority undergirded Israel’s renewal of the covenant:

- Joshua, God’s authorized leader, was in charge of this ceremony (24:1).
- Joshua’s speech began with the words, “Thus says the Lord ...” (24:2).

2. God's Covenant (47:03)

Throughout this account of covenant renewal, Joshua repeatedly referred to God's covenant:

- “Joshua made a covenant with the people that day” (24:25).
- “Joshua sent ... every man to his inheritance,” using the Hebrew term *nachalah* (24:28).

3. Standard of Moses' Law (48:17)

Joshua's covenant renewal acknowledged the standard of Moses' law:

- Joshua called Israel to reject foreign gods based on the prohibitions of idolatry found in Moses' law (24:14, 15; cf., Deuteronomy 11:28).
- Joshua drew from the Pentateuch when he declared the Lord “holy” and “a jealous God” (24:19; cf., Exodus 20:5).

4. God's Supernatural Power (49:20)

This chapter on covenant renewal stressed God's supernatural power:

- God personally listed things he had done for Israel (24:3-6a, 8-13).
- Joshua elaborated on what God had done for Israel (24:6b-7).

- The people confessed that God did great signs in Egypt and (24:17) and drove out all the peoples before them (24:18).
- Joshua warned, “If you forsake the Lord ... he will ... do you harm and consume you” (24:20).

5. All Israel (52:16)

Joshua’s covenant renewal begins and ends with references to the participation of all Israel:

- “[A]ll the tribes of Israel ... the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel” attended (24:1).
- Joshua dismissed “every man to his inheritance” (24:28).

IV. Christian Application (53:05)

As Christians, our relationship with God is governed primarily by the new covenant.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31).

In Jeremiah, the expression, “the days are coming” refers to the time when God’s blessings would be poured out on Israel after the Babylonian exile.

The new covenant will not end in failure like the covenant with Moses (Jeremiah 31:32-34).

When the new covenant comes into full effect, spiritual renewal will be complete for every individual counted among God's people.

The New Testament still calls believers to obedience and warns those who are tempted to turn from Christ because Christ fulfills the goals of his kingdom in three phases:

- Inauguration – Christ began his grand fulfillment of these goals during his first advent.
- Continuation – Christ goes on fulfilling these goals throughout church history.
- Consummation – Christ will complete the fulfillment of these goals when he returns in glory.

A. Inauguration (1:00:00)

The age of the new covenant began with Christ's first advent:

- Jesus spoke of "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).
- Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:6).
- Paul and his companions were "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The New Testament highlights two ways Christ inaugurated the new covenant:

- Jesus came as the Messiah:
 - He was incarnated as the Son of David who perfectly fulfilled the requirement of covenant loyalty to God.
 - He was granted the blessings of resurrection and ascension into heaven as the supreme ruler over all.
 - True believers are now "in Christ" — identified with Christ in the court of heaven, reigning with Christ in glory.

- Jesus did not bring the church on earth to the full perfection prophesied in Jeremiah:
 - The first-century church still included “false brothers,” (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4).
 - True believers are “in Christ,” and Christ is in us through the Holy Spirit as we live on the earth.
 - The Holy Spirit leads true believers in a lifelong process of sanctification (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Jesus and New Testament authors frequently emphasized covenant dynamics in ways that were very similar to Joshua’s warnings:

- ordained the regular preaching of the Word and the Lord’s Supper as means of covenant renewal
- highlighted God’s benevolences
- called the church to respond with loyalty to God (Romans 12:2)
- warned of the severe consequences of God’s judgment on those who turned from Christ (Hebrews 10:29)
- exhorted false brothers to come to saving faith
- exhorted true believers to continue in faithful service to God

The five themes of the last chapters of Joshua apply to the inauguration of the new covenant:

- Divine authority – Christ’s divine authority was supremely displayed in his first advent.
- God’s covenant – Christ established the dynamics of the new covenant.
- Standard of Moses’ law – Christ perfectly obeyed and called his followers to live according to God’s law in light of the new covenant.
- God’s supernatural power – God’s supernatural power was displayed in the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom.
- All Israel – Jesus and his apostles and prophets called for the unity of the church.

B. Continuation (1:05:56)

Joshua’s warnings and call for covenant renewal apply to the continuation of God’s people throughout church history.

Christ reigns in heaven and represents his people in the heavenly court:

- We are in Christ and our eternal blessings are secure in him.
- When we sin, Christ pleads on our behalf before the throne of God (Hebrews 7:25).

Christ's church on earth continues to be far from perfect:

- We must always “Strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).
- Because there are “false brothers” in the church, we are right to warn people not to fall away from Christ (1 Corinthians 10:12).
- The remnant of true believers will undergo temporary hardships as discipline from God (Revelation 3:19).

The themes of the last division of the book of Joshua speak to the church throughout the continuation of Christ's kingdom:

- Divine authority – Christ has been given authority over our churches and our individual lives today.
- God's covenant – We are to apply the dynamics of the new covenant in Christ as we acknowledge his benevolence, offer him our loyalty, and receive the consequences of his covenants.
- Standard of Moses' law – We should always look to the Scripture to guide us in light of what Christ has accomplished.
- God's supernatural power – We should rejoice in the supernatural power God displays to his church through Jesus, even today.
- All Israel – We must promote the unity of all of God's covenant people as the church spreads everywhere throughout the world.

C. Consummation (1:10:30)

When Christ returns in glory he will gain his full inheritance for his perfect covenant loyalty in the new heaven and new earth:

- “The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15)
- “Every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11)

When Christ returns, the church and the world will be utterly purified and glorified.

For unbelievers:

- The blessings received from God’s common grace will increase their eternal judgment.
- The curses experienced in this life will be but preludes to their eternal judgment.

For believers:

- Those who have exercised saving faith in Christ will share with him in the new creation.
- Every blessing received will be but a prelude to the glories that will be theirs.
- The temporary curses of discipline endured will yield a great reward (James 1:12; Revelation 22:3).

The themes of the last division of Joshua offer us great hope as we look forward to the consummation of Christ's kingdom:

- Divine authority – Our hope in Christ is backed by God's full authority.
- God's covenant – One day, we'll share in the full reward of Christ's perfect loyalty.
- Standard of Moses' law – We will be perfectly obedient to God's will as we are united with Christ in the new creation.
- God's supernatural power – We will see the incomparable display of Christ's power when he returns.
- All Israel – The new world will be filled with God's faithful people who will worship and serve him with unending joy.

V. Conclusion (1:13:50)

Application Questions

1. Does the requirement of covenant loyalty still apply to us today, or are we free from this requirement because Jesus' perfect obedience has already been applied to us?
2. Israel was guilty many times of idolatry. The Reformer John Calvin wrote that "Man's nature ... is a perpetual factory of idols." What does your heart tend to idolize? What does the culture that you live in idolize? What are some ways you can address and reject this idolatry in your own life and culture?
3. Old Testament Israel often erected stones as memorials to God. Is it wrong for Christians today to memorialize God with physical objects? How can believers today celebrate and commemorate God and his mighty deeds?
4. Joshua reminded Israel of God's faithfulness by reviewing God's mighty works. How do we in the church do this same kind of thing today? What are the ways that we could do more to rehearse and remember God's past faithfulness, both personally and corporately?
5. Joshua said, "... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). What strategies can we use to ensure that we remain loyal to the Lord? How can you develop a godly legacy?
6. What do you think God meant when he said, through Jeremiah, "I will put my law within [my people], and I will write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33)? What does this promise mean for our lives today?
7. How do we receive greater blessings under the new covenant than Old Testament Israelites received under the previous covenants? How have you seen these blessings manifested in your own life?
8. Read Hebrews 12:5-11. Why does God discipline us if he has forgiven our sins through Jesus' atoning death? How can we use this text to compassionately counsel someone who is going through trials or hardships?
9. The apostle Paul taught that there will be "false brothers" in the church until Jesus returns to consummate his kingdom, and if they don't repent, they are doomed to suffer God's eternal judgment. Should the presence of unbelievers in your local congregation change how you preach the Word? Why or why not?
10. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

abad – Hebrew verb (transliteration) meaning to work or serve

abar – Hebrew verb (transliteration) with several meanings, including: to pass over or through; to take away; to transgress

Abraham – Old Testament patriarch, son of Terah, father of the nation of Israel with whom God made a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 promising innumerable descendants and a special land

apostasy – Rebellion against God after a profession of faith; total rejection of one's faith, religion or principles

Canaanites – People descended from Canaan, the son of Ham, who lived in the land of Canaan before Joshua's conquest

Cisjordan – The lands to the west of the Jordan River that God promised to Israel as an inheritance (lit. "beside the Jordan")

consummation – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

continuation – The second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

David – Second Old Testament king of Israel who received the promise that his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

false brothers – Unbelievers within the church

inauguration – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

Joshua – Leader of Israel after the death of Moses who brought the Israelites into the Promised Land and faithfully distributed Israel's tribal inheritances

Levites – Those from the tribe of Levi; served as priests for the nation of Israel

Messiah – Hebrew word meaning "anointed one"; the great King from David's royal line who would bring about the transition from this age to the age to come; translated "Christos" in Greek

Moses – Old Testament prophet and deliverer who led the Israelites out of Egypt; man with whom God made a national "covenant of law" and who administered the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant to the Israelites; also appeared with Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration

nachalah – Hebrew noun (transliteration) meaning "inheritance"

new covenant – The covenant of fulfillment in Christ; first mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31

Promised Land – The land that God promised to give as an inheritance to Abraham and his descendants

Shechem – City located near Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim where Abraham built his first altar in the land of Canaan and where Israel renewed their covenant with God in the days of Joshua

Shiloh – City in the territory of Ephraim where Joshua held an assembly near the time of his death and where Samuel was dedicated to the Lord's service

Transjordan – The lands to the east of the Jordan River where the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh received permission to settle (lit. "across the Jordan")