

BaptistWay Bible Series for Oct. 9: Entering the Promised Land takes commitment

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Entering the Promised Land takes commitment

- Joshua 24:1-3, 13-25

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Make up your mind! Fish or cut bait!

How many times have you heard those demands? How many times have you made them? There are many reasons some decisions can be very difficult to make. One is that life is full of choices.

Marketers cater to every detail and dimension of human preferences. The result has been—from cars to frozen dinners—a myriad and usually confusing number of options.

Another is that so many things vie for our attention and our allegiance. Some are, in and of themselves, good and healthy. Others are not so. Nevertheless, all and each call on us to give them the majority of our

attention and place them at the top of our list of priorities.

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Then, there are people who find commitment difficult. And that is what making a decision really amounts to—committing to one way over another. These people may be afraid to “put all their eggs into one basket.” Perhaps they unrealistically are waiting for “something better” to come along. They may fear the personal investment real commitment requires.

In the Scripture passage for this lesson, the Israelites had reached the point of decision.

In chapters 13-23 of Joshua, we read of Israel’s campaign of conquest by which they established their presence in Canaan. Striking through the middle of Canaan, they divided and conquered. Then the land was divided among the Israelite tribes.

After the allotment, we read Joshua’s farewell address in chapter 23. In that passage, Joshua reminds Israel of the many great works God had done on their behalf. He encourages them to follow in faith. And he cautions them against allying with those who do not worship the Lord.

Finally, in chapter 24, Joshua calls Israel together at Shechem, between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Shechem had been an important Canaanite urban and worship center and the site where the Canaanite god, Baal-berith (significant to this lesson meaning “lord of the covenant”) had stood.

But it also was a significant place for Israel. Genesis 12:6-7 tells us it was where God had promised Abram the surrounding land and where Abram had built an altar in response. Genesis 33:18-20 tells of Jacob buying land within sight of Shechem. He named the site “El Elohe Israel,” which meant either “God the God of Israel” or “mighty is the God of Israel.”

How appropriate that near El Elohe Israel—as we read in 24:1-13 —Joshua refers to God’s work on behalf of Israel, beginning with Abraham, through Egypt and the wandering, and, finally, into Canaan.

“Beyond the river” in 24:14 refers to the Euphrates River in today’s Iraq. That was the ancestral homeland of Abram/Abraham. The Lord had called their great forefather out of this area and the worship of many gods. In 24:14, Joshua also alludes to Israel’s exposure, during the many years of sojourn and bondage in Egypt, to the worship of the Egyptian gods.

Joshua was challenging Israel, in light of what the Lord has done in keeping his covenant/contract obligations, to choose whom to serve. It was as if to say: Abraham, Moses and many of your ancestors made their commitments. Now is the time for you to make your own.

Many “gods” were vying for the attention and hearts of the Israelites. However, Joshua was making the point that it was the Lord who had redeemed them. It was the Lord who had called them. It was the Lord who had preserved them. And it was the Lord who had done mighty works and won victories for them.

Joshua was challenging them, therefore, to commit to that same Lord God. He was saying to Israel, in other words, “Dance with who brung ya.” 24:15 shows Joshua’s leadership in his willingness to follow God regardless of what may have been the response of others.

Israel replied with words of commitment to worship and serve the Lord God who had freed and preserved them. But Joshua wondered if perhaps they

had answered too quickly and too easily. Did they understand the challenges of their commitment? Could they, would they, persevere? Could they truly put away the foreign gods/idols as needed to fulfill their promise (v. 23)?

We should ask ourselves the same questions. The Lord who redeemed Israel redeemed us. He preserved them. He preserves us. Just as he had done great things for them, he has done great things for us. He called Israel to serve him. He calls us. And we, too, are challenged each day to decide whom we will serve.

Are we afraid of the commitment? (Listen, nothing better is coming along.) Or do we make those commitments too easily? Are we willing and ready to fully serve God as Lord of our lives? How is our commitment to God incomplete—what do we hold back? Will we put away all the things that keep us from a deeper commitment to God? How would complete commitment to God change our lives?

This is the challenge of faith: among all the “gods” vying for your heart, “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.”

Discussion questions

- What are some otherwise good and healthy things that you have put ahead of God in your list of priorities?
- How would your life be different if you put those away and returned God to his rightful place in your life?

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