

# New Land, New Me

## Joshua 23:1-8

### Pierre Cannings, Ph.D.

#### I. New Land v.1

- a. Rest - to **secure repose, rest**
  - i. Some 10 or 20 years after the end of the Conquest and distribution of the land **Joshua**
  - ii. The “long time” harks back to 22:3; the idea of “rest” echoes earlier statements in 11:23; 14:15; 21:44
- b. Enemies on Every Side

#### II. New Land, Same God vs.3-5

- a. Seen
  - i. All the Lord your God has Done
    - 1. To all these nations
  - ii. Because of You
  - iii. Fighting For you
- b. Apportioned
  - i. Apportioned- to **fall down** (deliberately), **throw oneself down**
  - ii. Inheritance **inalienable, hereditary property**, in the case of conquest, hereditary division of the property between an individual or the family as their share of the booty, consisting of lands
  - iii. I have cut off
    - 1. From Jordan to Great Sea to the Sun
    - 2. In v. 4, Joshua shifted the focus to his own role as distributor of the tribes’ inheritances. That Joshua had been a primary figure in the land distributions was well established (see 11:23; 12:7; 14:12, 13; 15:13; 17:4, 14; 21:2; 22:7).
    - 3. Joshua begins by defining Israel through looking at her history. Israel is the people for whom Yahweh fights against all the nations (Exod 14:14, 25; Deut 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; Josh 10:14, 25, 29, 42), thus fulfilling his promise to be with them (contrast Exod 33:1–3 and Josh 1:5, 9, 17). Without divine presence and assistance in battle, Israel has no identity. This summarizes chaps. 1–12.
- c. Thrust
  - i. Thrust- to come unexpectedly, to push away
    - 1. Before You

- ii. Drive Them Out
  1. After looking back at what God had done for Israel in vv. 3–4, Joshua now looked forward to what he would do. He would drive out Israel’s enemies so that Israel could possess the land, in fulfillment of his promises (cf. Deut 9:3–5; Josh 3:10; 13:6).
- d. Possess the Land
  - i. As He Promised
    1. Avoiding any temptation to elevate himself Joshua reminded the leaders of Israel that their enemies had been defeated solely because **the LORD** their **God** had **fought for** them. The battles were the Lord’s, not his.
    2. Thus Israel saw God fulfilling his promises, but constantly placing a new task before his people.
    3. God’s promise to push out the remaining nations takes up the promises of eut 6:19 and 9:3–4. To “dispossess them” reaches back to Exod 34:24; Num 32:21; Deut 4:38; 9:4–5; 11:23; 18:12; Josh 3:10; 13:6 (cf. Judg 11:23). The promise to “possess them” takes up the language of the promise to Abraham in Gen 15:7 (cf. 22:17; 24:60; 28:4).

### III. New Land, New You vs. 6-8

- a. Very Firm
  - i. Firm - to remain resolute
    1. The task is not, however, stated in military terms. Rather it is in terms of obedience to God’s will (1:7–8; Exod 24:7; Deut 28:58, 61; 29:19–20, 26 [Eng. 29:20–21, 27]; 30:10; 31:24, 26; Josh 8:31, 34; cf. Exod 34:27–28).
  - ii. Keep - to stick to an agreement, devote oneself
  - iii. Do
    1. Written in the Book of Law of Moses
    2. The Israelites’ success was dependent on their obedience and on the centrality of the law in their lives (v. 6).
  - iv. Not Turn Aside
    1. To the Right or the Left
    2. Despite Israel’s triumphs, she had a nagging problem. Enemies remained in the land God had given her (13:1–7), precisely in the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean (cf. the problem of chap. 22).
- b. Not Associate
  - i. Associate - to be among to get involved, to **associate with** somebody
    1. The Israelites were to keep themselves uncontaminated by the nations who remained among them and by the gods they worshiped (v. 7). The problem of mixing with the peoples of the

land and adopting their worship loyalties was the most severe problem throughout Israel's history in the land, affecting it in almost every era.

- a. It quickly became the dominant problem in the period of the judges (Judg 2:10–19).
  - b. It was the cause of Solomon's downfall and the split in the kingdom (1 Kings 11).
  - c. It was the cause of the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 17:7–23), as well as of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Kgs 21; 24:3–4).
  - d. It was a problem even in the postexilic period, when the people should have learned their lesson (Ezra 9:1–2; Neh 13:23–27).
  - e. Thus, while Joshua's speech was warm-hearted and hortatory in tone, it nevertheless contained ample warnings and signs of the troubles that were to come, troubles that would be caused by Israel's associations with the nations that remained among them (Josh 23:4, 7, 12–13).
2. Specifically Joshua dreaded Israel's conformity to the heathen **nations** around them so he forbade all contact and fraternization, knowing that his people would backslide step by step till in the course of their decline they would prostrate themselves before the shrines of the pagan deities (cf. 23:16). Instead he exhorted them **to hold fast to the LORD** (cf. 22:5)
- ii. These nations
    1. Not remain
  - iii. Mention name of their gods
    1. Swear, Serve, and Bow by them
    2. Here is Yahweh's claim to the absolute allegiance of his people, a claim totally unique in Israel's environment, where everyone worshiped many gods, even though the national god was seen as the chief god or the king of the gods. For Israel, Yahweh claimed to fulfill all the functions for which other nations needed a multitude of gods. The problem was that Israel could never really come to believe the claim totally. She constantly sought the favors of the gods who had claimed to give fertility to the land long before Israel entered it or the gods who seemed at the moment to have military power
    3. Israel's identity hangs on her uniqueness. Whereas the nations serve many gods, she serves only one. She must avoid all contact with the nations in order to avoid all temptation from their gods. Specifically, she is not to call to remembrance the names of their gods (Exod 23:13; Isa 26:13), that is to praise them and to

acknowledge their divine power. If the MT is correct (cf. Notes), she is not to take oaths in the name of other gods (cf. Deut 6:13; 10:20), that is to call upon other gods to guarantee the fulfillment of promises, for this is at the same time a recognition of the power of the god

c. Cling

i. Cling to the Lord

1. Cling - **stick**

2. Instead of following the Canaanites' gods, the Israelites were to cling to their own God (v. 8). The word translated "hold fast" "to cling tightly." The root refers to the soldering process in Isa 41:7 (i.e., a process in which things are joined together inseparably).

3. This word has a rich theological content, showing the extreme closeness that people were to have with their God. For example, Hezekiah, a good king par excellence in Judah, is commended in terms of his trusting and "holding fast

4. The writer uses an oath formula to call upon Israel to cling to Yahweh (cf. Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:5; 30:20; Josh 22:5). The other choice is for the sicknesses of Egypt to cling to Israel (Deut 28:60). The writer encourages Israel by noting that she has succeeded in such total loyalty up to this point

ii. As you have done

# Word Studies

Rest- to **secure repose, rest**

**Apportioned** - to **fall down** (deliberately), **throw oneself down**<sup>1</sup>

**Thrust** - to come unexpectedly, to push away

Firm - to remain resolute

Keep- to stick to an agreement, devote oneself

Associate – to be among to get involved, to **associate with** somebody<sup>2</sup>

Cling - to **cling to, stick**

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 710.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 113.

# Commentary Studies

## ***Form/Structure/Setting***

The temporal clause of v 1 clearly marks the beginning of a new narrative. The threat of 15–16 closes the narrative content. For this reason, we divide our exegesis at this point. The grammar, however, of 24:1 connects this closely to the preceding, so that one might well argue that the two chapters form a unit.

Every verse of the chapter displays Deuteronomistic theology and vocabulary (cf. the lists of M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 320–59). The only remaining literary question reduces to the number of Deuteronomists or the stage of Deuteronomistic activity at which the chapter was written (cf. Smend, *Das Gesetz*; Halbe, *Privilegrecht*). The form of the chapter may be approached from two perspectives. The opening verse connects it with the deathbed blessings of the patriarchs (Jacob, Gen 48–49; Joseph, Gen 50:22–26; Moses, Deut 33 and the book of Deuteronomy; David, 2 Sam 23:1–7; 1 Kgs 2:1–9; cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 11–14). The content and form, however, are distinctive, having many connections with the “Covenant Formulary” (Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*; McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*):

1. Antecedent History, vv 3–5
2. Statement of substance (or basic principle), vv 6–8
3. (Transformed) blessing, vv 9–10
4. Restatement of basic principle, v 11
5. Curse, vv 12–13, 15–16.

The content thus relates to that of a covenant renewal ceremony, but again in a distinctive manner. The liturgy of covenant renewal has become the sermon of a dying leader. Baltzer relates this to the Hittite vassal treaties, where the aged king appoints his successor and secures the allegiance to him from the next generation. He fails to note that Josh 23 knows of no successor. Here the burden is placed strictly on the congregation. He does note that blessing and curse have become successive events in history. The content of covenant renewal has become the sermonic blessing of the patriarch in a unique way, for the final and dominating word is a curse, not a blessing. This reveals the setting for which the message is intended, namely that of the Israelite community of the Exile who have experienced both blessing and curse. Joshua 23 explains why God had brought the curse upon Israel. As Perlitt (*Bundestheologie*) has shown, the arc of tension runs from Josh 23 to 2 Kgs 17, where the curse is realized. The arc of tension runs even further. It connects also to 2 Kgs 21:1–16; 23:26–27, where the curse of Josh 23 is realized even more fully. But Josh 23 has also a narrower arc of tension, which runs simply to Judg 2, particularly vv 6–23 and 3:1–6, where the transgression of the covenant begins and the curse is initiated (cf. especially vv 20–23). Joshua 23 thus plays a

key role in the biblical story. It foreshadows the remainder of the history of Israel, placing that history under the dark shadow of curse from its very inception.

The chapter not only points forward. It also has backward connections. As in Exod 19:4–6 Israel looked back to the Exodus, so in 23:3–4 Israel looks back at the conquest. As in Exod 23:23–33 God promised Israel to drive out their enemies and commanded Israel not to worship other Gods, so in Josh 23:5–13. As Exod 33:1–3 illustrated the curse of divine wrath, so 23:13, 15–16 threatened such a curse upon Israel. As Exod 34 depicts the covenant with Israel based on God defeating the enemies and Israel refraining from any contact with the gods of the enemies, so Josh 23 presupposes such a covenant and the dire consequences of disobedience. This is the theology which is preached in the entire book of Deuteronomy, finding its climax in the blessings and curses of chaps. 27–29. It is the theology which introduces the book of Joshua (especially 1:1–9). Finally, the setting of Josh 23 repeats that of chap. 13, an aged Joshua facing Israel with much land yet to be divided.

Joshua 23 is thus a centerpiece, taking up the themes stretching from Sinai onward and casting their light into the period of the judges, into the divided monarchy and finally into the Babylonian Exile. As such, Josh 23 is the theological explanation of the history of Israel herself.

### **Comment**

<sup>1</sup> Unlike other narrative texts, this one has no specific setting in time or space. It simply connects to 13:1, when Joshua was old, and 21:44, when God had given rest. The setting thus marks Israel at the moment she had dreamed of from the Exodus onward (Exod 33:14). But it also marks the crisis of leadership transition. The message which follows is at the same time one for prosperity, and also for crisis.

<sup>2</sup> The list of leaders joins those of the first half of the book: *elders* (6:21; 7:6; 8:10, 33; cf. 20:4) *judges* (8:33; cf. K. W. Whitelam, *The Just King* [JSOTS 12; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979] 198); and *officials* (1:10; 3:2; 8:33), with those of the second half: *heads* (14:1; 19:51; 21:1; 22:14, 21, 30). Interestingly, there is no mention of chiefs nor priests. The setting is a meeting of the “secular” leaders of the community.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua begins by defining Israel through looking at her history. Israel is the people for whom Yahweh fights against all the nations (Exod 14:14, 25; Deut 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; Josh 10:14, 25, 29, 42), thus fulfilling his promise to be with them (contrast Exod 33:1–3 and Josh 1:5, 9, 17). Without divine presence and assistance in battle, Israel has no identity. This summarizes chaps. 1–12.

<sup>4</sup> Despite Israel’s triumphs, she had a nagging problem. Enemies remained in the land God had given her (13:1–7), precisely in the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean (cf. the problem of chap. 22). Just as God had portioned out the land to the tribes (14–19), so he now has apportioned out the nations (cf. 13:6, the only other appearance of the *Hiph’il* of the verb פָּרַץ in Joshua). This represents the other side of the picture from that emphasized in 21:43–45. Israel has the land. She must no longer fight for it. But she still has nagging enemies. Judges 1:1–3:6 takes up the same problem from various perspectives (cf. Exod 23:27–31).

<sup>5</sup> God's promise to push out the remaining nations takes up the promises of Deut 6:19 and 9:3–4. To "dispossess them" reaches back to Exod 34:24; Num 32:21; Deut 4:38; 9:4–5; 11:23; 18:12; Josh 3:10; 13:6 (cf. Judg 11:23). The promise to "possess them" takes up the language of the promise to Abraham in Gen 15:7 (cf. 22:17; 24:60; 28:4). This is underlined in Lev 20:24. The promise begins to be fulfilled in Num 21:24, 35, but remains the overarching promise repeated in Num 33:53 and the task of Israel throughout Deuteronomy (1:8, 21, 39, and over sixty times). Thus it is not surprising that Joshua's marching orders are to go and possess the land (1:11, 15). At the end of the conquest, he still faced more land to possess (13:1) and implored the tribes to possess the land (18:3). The concluding summary is likewise in terms of possession (21:43), but even then the task remains (23:5). Thus Israel saw God fulfilling his promises, but constantly placing a new task before his people.

<sup>6</sup> The task is not, however, stated in military terms. Rather it is in terms of obedience to God's will (1:7–8; Exod 24:7; Deut 28:58, 61; 29:19–20, 26 [Eng. 29:20–21, 27]; 30:10; 31:24, 26; Josh 8:31, 34; cf. Exod 34:27–28).

<sup>7</sup> The major concern of the Deuteronomistic law is now summarized. Israel's identity hangs on her uniqueness. Whereas the nations serve many gods, she serves only one. She must avoid all contact with the nations in order to avoid all temptation from their gods. Specifically, she is not to call to remembrance the names of their gods (Exod 23:13; Isa 26:13), that is to praise them and to acknowledge their divine power. If the M<sup>4</sup>T is correct (cf. Notes), she is not to take oaths in the name of other gods (cf. Deut 6:13; 10:20), that is to call upon other gods to guarantee the fulfillment of promises, for this is at the same time a recognition of the power of the god (C. A. Keller, *THA<sup>5</sup>T*, 2 [1976] 860–61; cf. Jer 5:7; 12:16; Zeph 1:5). She is not to serve other gods, but only Yahweh (Exod 3:12; 20:5; 23:24–25, 33; Deut 4:19, 28; 6:13; 7:4, 16; 8:19; 10:12, 20; 11:13, 16; 12:2, 30; 13:5, 7, 14; 17:3; 28:14, 36, 47, 64; 29:17, 25; 30:17; 31:20; Josh 22:5, 27). Such service includes cultic worship (cf. especially Num 4; 8; 18), but extends to the total binding of oneself as a servant to God (cf. Deut 28:47–48; Floss, *Jahwe dienen*). Finally, Israel must not bow down in worship to other gods (Exod 20:5; 23:24; 32:8; 34:14; Lev 26:1; Num 25:2; Deut 4:19; 5:9; 8:19; 11:16; 17:3; 29:25; 30:17). Here is Yahweh's claim to the absolute allegiance of his people, a claim totally unique in Israel's environment, where everyone worshiped many gods, even though the national god was seen as the chief god or the king of the gods. For Israel, Yahweh claimed to fulfill all the functions for which other nations needed a multitude of gods. The problem was that Israel could never really come to believe the claim totally. She constantly sought the favors of the gods who had claimed to give fertility to the land long before Israel entered it or the gods who seemed at the moment to have military power. In all circumstances, Yahweh demanded absolute allegiance of his "slave people," if they did not want to return to the slavery in Egypt.

<sup>8</sup> The writer uses an oath formula to call upon Israel to cling to Yahweh (cf. Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:5; 30:20; Josh 22:5). The other choice is for the sicknesses of Egypt to cling to Israel (Deut 28:60). The writer encourages Israel by noting that she has succeeded in such total loyalty

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<sup>4</sup>MT Masoretic

<sup>5</sup>*THAT Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann



up to this point. Such language is applicable only to the conquest generation, being just the opposite of the wilderness generation and all succeeding ones.<sup>6</sup>

**23:1** This entire verse sets the stage for the activity of the chapter. Syntactically, it is all prefatory to the main action, which begins in v. 2.<sup>740</sup> Every statement in this verse echoes earlier ones. The “long time” harks back to 22:3; the idea of “rest” echoes earlier statements in 11:23; 14:15; 21:44; and the statement on Joshua’s advanced age repeats a similar statement in 13:1. All three statements refer to the passage of time in one way or another. *Because of this passage of time, because the land now had rest, and because Joshua was old and his end was near, it was now appropriate for him to look back to remind the people of God’s faithfulness and to look ahead, exhorting and warning them about the future.*

The exact time intended here is impossible to know with certainty, but it appears to refer to a time many years after the events in chaps. 13–21, and even chap. 22. The verse clearly echoes 13:1 in stating that Joshua was “old and well advanced in years,” and it also echoes 21:44—both verses state that the Lord had given the people rest. Some scholars believe that the “long time” here is calculated from the *beginning* of the book (i.e., when God began to give rest to the land).<sup>841</sup> However, it is also possible—and, in actuality, more probable—that the “long time”

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<sup>6</sup> Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, vol. 7, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 253–255.

<sup>740</sup> The *wayēhî* + prepositional phrase construction, indicating a time reference, is not resolved until the *wayyiqṭōl* verb form at the beginning of v. 2, indicating that everything in v. 1 sets the stage for what follows. For more on this construction, see note at 4:11.

<sup>841</sup> E.g., Woudstra, *Joshua*, 332.

should be calculated from the *completion* of the process (i.e., that the speeches in chaps. 23 and 24 came “a long time” after the land distribution was completed, when God had finally given true rest to the land).<sup>492</sup> In support of this, we may note that the farewell speeches, as they are presented in chaps. 23 and 24, appear to have come at the end of Joshua’s life. Indeed, in 23:14, Joshua stated that he was about to go “the way of all the earth today,” indicating that his death was fairly close at hand. He was 110 years old when he died (24:29), and, if he was anywhere near Caleb’s age of eighty-five when the land was distributed (see 14:10), then his farewell speeches would have come about twenty-five years after the main events in the book. (See also the note on 14:10.)

**23:2** This was an all-inclusive speech in the sense that it was delivered to a wide range of the nation’s leaders, who represented the entire nation. By way of contrast, in 24:2 we are told that Joshua spoke directly to “all the people” in addition to the leaders of the nation.

## **(2) Exhortations and Admonitions: Part One (23:3–8)**

**<sup>3</sup>You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. <sup>4</sup>Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. <sup>5</sup>The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.**

**<sup>6</sup>“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. <sup>7</sup>Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. <sup>8</sup>But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.**

**23:3–4** Joshua’s speech more properly begins at the end of v. 2, where he acknowledged what the narrator had stated in v. 1, that he was “old and well advanced in years.” He referred to himself—“*As for me, I am old*”—in order to contrast himself with his addressees, to whom his first words were “*As for you, you have seen.*”<sup>4103</sup>

In vv. 3–4, Joshua took his first look back at what God had done for the nation. In v. 3, he reminded the nation that the Lord had fought for them, and that they themselves had been witnesses of this (“you have seen”). The reference to God’s fighting for Israel repeats the idea that the land was God’s and that he would give it to them, even to the extent of fighting on their behalf (see also Deut 7:1; 11:23–25; Josh 1:5, 9; 8:7; 10:14, 19, 42; etc.).

In v. 4, Joshua shifted the focus to his own role as distributor of the tribes’ inheritances. That Joshua had been a primary figure in the land distributions was well established (see 11:23; 12:7; 14:12, 13; 15:13; 17:4, 14; 21:2; 22:7). What had not been emphasized previously was Joshua’s claim to individual conquest, which the NIV’s rendering indicates: “the nations I conquered” (lit.,

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<sup>942</sup> Keil (*Book of Joshua*, 223) and C. J. Goslinga (*Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, BSC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 164) both appear to take this position.

<sup>1043</sup> In each case, a pleonastic (i.e., redundant) pronoun is found before the verb, indicating this emphasis on the two contrasting subjects.

“all the nations that I cut off” [*krt*].<sup>4114</sup> It was Yahweh who had fought Israel’s battles, not any individual. Nevertheless, a precedent for this unusual claim is found in 11:21, which states that “Joshua went and destroyed (lit., “cut off” [*krt*]) the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir, and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns.” Later in the same passage we are told that “Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions” (11:23). Both in chap. 11 and here Joshua’s individual conquests are linked to his giving of lands as the Israelites’ proper inheritance. Even though he is said to have given the tribes their inheritances, we know that ultimately it was God who did this (i.e., Joshua acted as his agent). These references to Joshua’s fighting and conquering peoples must be understood in the same way: God fought for Israel, and Joshua was his agent in several cases.

Joshua’s speech emphasizes the foreign nations that remained among the Israelites in a way that no other speech heretofore has done (see esp. vv. 3, 4 [2x], 7, 9, 12, 13). The term for “nations” (*gôyîm*) is found seven times in this chapter, as opposed to only six times previously.<sup>4125</sup> This term normally refers to foreign, pagan nations, and here the danger from these godless nations is emphasized. The lands belonging to the nations in Canaan had been allotted as the Israelites’ inheritance in the earlier transactions of allotting the territories (on the allotment, see the commentary on 14:2).

**23:5** After looking back at what God had done for Israel in vv. 3–4, Joshua now looked forward to what he would do. He would drive out Israel’s enemies so that Israel could possess the land, in fulfillment of his promises (cf. Deut 9:3–5; Josh 3:10; 13:6).

**23:6–8** Then, after focusing on what God had done and would do for his people, Joshua exhorted them in terms similar to what God had said to Moses and to him on earlier occasions. The Israelites’ success was dependent on their obedience and on the centrality of the law in their lives (v. 6). Joshua here charged the Israelites in terms almost identical to God’s charge to him (see 1:7–8) and, to a lesser extent, with which he had exhorted the Transjordan tribes (22:5).

The Israelites were to keep themselves uncontaminated by the nations who remained among them and by the gods they worshiped (v. 7). The problem of mixing with the peoples of the land and adopting their worship loyalties was the most severe problem throughout Israel’s history in the land, affecting it in almost every era. It quickly became the dominant problem in the period of the judges (Judg 2:10–19). It was the cause of Solomon’s downfall and the split in the kingdom (1 Kings 11). It was the cause of the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 17:7–23), as well as of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Kgs 21; 24:3–4). It was a problem even in the postexilic period, when the people should have learned their lesson (Ezra 9:1–2; Neh 13:23–27). Thus, while Joshua’s speech was warm-hearted and hortatory in tone, it nevertheless contained ample warnings and signs of the troubles that were to come, troubles

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<sup>1144</sup> This verse in fact is the subject of some discussion on a textual level because the syntax is somewhat awkward. However, the major versions follow the MT, and it is intelligible—if not completely smooth—as it stands. See the discussions in Boling, *Joshua*, 521; Butler, *Joshua*, 252.

<sup>1245</sup> See 3:17; 4:1; 5:6, 8; 10:13; 12:23.

that would be caused by Israel's associations with the nations that remained among them (Josh 23:4, 7, 12–13).

Instead of following the Canaanites' gods, the Israelites were to cling to their own God (v. 8). The word translated "hold fast" (*dbq*; also used in v. 12 and in 22:5) means "to cling tightly." The root refers to the soldering process in Isa 41:7 (i.e., a process in which things are joined together inseparably).<sup>136</sup> This word has a rich theological content, showing the extreme closeness that people were to have with their God. For example, Hezekiah, a good king par excellence in Judah, is commended in terms of his trusting and "holding fast" (*dbq*) to God (2 Kgs 18:5–6).<sup>14</sup>

### *The first round (23:1–8)*

23:1–2. Some 10 or 20 years after the end of the Conquest and distribution of the land **Joshua ... summoned Israel's leaders**, probably to Shiloh where the tabernacle was located, to warn them earnestly of the dangers of departing from Yahweh. It was a solemn meeting. No doubt Caleb was there, along with Eleazer the priest, and the soldiers of the Conquest who had exchanged their swords for plowshares and were now heads of families, **elders**, and **judges**.

They had come without hesitation in response to Joshua's call to hear the last words of their great chief. And the **old** veteran spoke on one theme—**God's unfailing faithfulness to Israel and their corresponding responsibility to be faithful to Him. Three times he repeated his central**

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<sup>1346</sup> The root here—קבץ—is the basis for Modern Hebrew's word for "glue" (קבץ), illustrating the point further. The word is used in the OT in a literal sense of a hand clinging to a sword (2 Sam 23:10), sections of armor (1 Kgs 22:34) or the scales of a crocodile (Job 41:17, 23 [Hb. 9, 15]) forming a joint, metal being joined by a blacksmith (Isa 41:7), a belt clinging to a man's waist (Jer 13:11), the tongue sticking to the roof of one's mouth (Ezek 3:26; Ps 22:15 [Hb. 16]; 137:6; Job 29:10; Lam 4:4); skin clinging to bones (Ps 102:5 [Hb. 6]; Job 19:20); or of dirt hardened by lack of rain (Job 38:38). In personal relations it describes "a state of loyalty, affection, or close proximity" (G. J. Brooke, "קבץ," *NIDOTTE* 1:911). It is used of loyalty to Yahweh in Deut 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4, 17; Josh 22:5; 2 Kgs 18:6; Ps 63:8. The LXX usually translates it with κολλάω (or προσκολλάω), "to glue, cement, join," which is found twelve times in the NT including Matt 19:5 (quoting Gen 2:24).

<sup>14</sup> David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, vol. 5, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 419–422.

message (vv. 3–8, 9–13, 14–16). Three times, fearful they would not hear and heed, he emphasized the faithfulness of God and the responsibility of Israel.

23:3–5. Avoiding any temptation to elevate himself Joshua reminded the leaders of Israel that their enemies had been defeated solely because **the LORD** their **God** had **fought for** them. The battles were the Lord's, not his. A psalmist reiterated this affirmation (Ps. 44:3). As for the Canaanites, who still lingered about the country, **the LORD ... God** would **push them out** also so that Israel could **take possession of the land** they partially occupied.

23:6–8. Turning to impress the Israelites with their responsibility, Joshua passed on the very words Yahweh had armed him with when He instructed him to cross the Jordan: **Be ... strong; be careful to obey** (cf. 1:6–9). Courage and obedience were the graces that led to the successful Conquest of Canaan and they were no less essential now (cf. 22:5). Specifically Joshua dreaded Israel's conformity to the heathen **nations** around them so he forbade all contact and fraternization, knowing that his people would backslide step by step till in the course of their decline they would prostrate themselves before the shrines of the pagan deities (cf. 23:16). Instead he exhorted them **to hold fast to the LORD** (cf. 22:5).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Donald K. Campbell, "[Joshua](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 367–368.