

**"CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY WHOM YE
SHALL SERVE."**

– JOSHUA 24:14-25. – NOVEMBER 9. –

DECISION, one of the most important elements of Christian character, is the essence of this lesson. When Joshua was about 110 years old, realizing that his course was about run, he called a general assembly of the Israelites, presumably the heads of every tribe and family, and reviewed before them the Lord's mercies from the time of the call of Abraham. It was now about thirty years since Joshua had succeeded Moses as the leader and law-giver, the judge of the nation. Under his able administration Canaan had been divided amongst the tribes, and a quarter of a century of prosperity in the new land had followed, not, however, without its conflicts and difficulties. In leaving the people Joshua sought to impress upon them not only the blessings and favors that they had received of the Lord, but also the obligations which they had assumed in becoming his people prospectively; heirs of the Abrahamic covenant, and blessers of all the nations of the earth. He shows how Abraham's fore-fathers had been idolaters "on the other side of the flood," that is, on the other side of the great river Euphrates; and that God's favor had been markedly with Abraham and his posterity up to the time of which he spoke. In order to impress upon their minds what they might expect of the Lord in the future, he calls pointedly to their attention his dealings with them in the past, the lessons in Egypt, the deliverances, the crossing of the Red Sea, the experiences of the wilderness, their crossing of Jordan into the land of promise, their conquest of the land against the various inhabitants. He would have them remember that these victories were not of their own strength or ability or wisdom, but that the Lord was on their side; calling attention also to one of the great battles in which their enemies were discomfited by great swarms of hornets, and then he comes to the exhortation which constitutes this lesson.

It is profitable, too, that the spiritual Israelite frequently take such a review of God's providences. He may look back not only to God's manifestations of favor and power during the Jewish age to natural Israel, but he may see also divine favor of another time granted to spiritual Israel during this gospel age. Noting the differences of dispensations, he can see that God's blessings were of a temporal kind during the Jewish age; that those who were faithful to the Lord were blessed in their flocks and herds and earthly advantages and health, while during this Gospel age those who reverently obey the Lord and seek to walk in his ways are blessed in spiritual things; he opens the eyes of their understanding, feeds their hearts; grants them refreshment of the water of life, and light of the knowledge of the goodness of God which shines in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord, and makes known to his faithful the lengths and breadths and depths and heights of divine love, wisdom, **[R3093 : page 314]** and power. They now realize a protection from the world, the flesh and the adversary, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding rules in their hearts, even though the same divine providence may permit them to have various trials and difficulties, persecutions and disappointments and reverses, physical, financial and social. The spiritual Israelite's evidence of divine favor on his behalf is in the healing of his soul from the sicknesses of sin, and in the invigoration of the new life, and in the victories over the weaknesses of the flesh and the oppositions of the Adversary – these are potent arguments with the spiritual Israelite respecting the goodness and faithfulness of our God, as the temporal victories recited by Joshua were evidences of them to the natural Israelite.

As Moses before he died had called upon Israel to renew their covenant with the Lord, so Joshua desired at the close of his days to make an appeal to his brethren on behalf of faithfulness to the Lord, that would long be remembered by them. He recognized the fact that God seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth – not of fear, not of compulsion but of a willing mind, and his argument accordingly was along this line – Brethren, let us make a

firm resolve that in view of God's goodness to us we will ever be faithful to him; let us fear him in the sense of reverencing his commands, in the sense of fearing to displease one who has been so gracious to us; let us remember, too, that notwithstanding [R3094 : page 314] his graciousness, he is dealing with us along the line of principle, and that if we depart from the principles he approves his blessing and favor will depart from us. Let us put away, therefore, the gods which your fathers served, and serve Jehovah only. It may have been that there was still a lurking of idolatry amongst the people, or it may have been that Joshua was merely guarding them against the idolatrous tendencies which more or less assail all mankind – a tendency to forget more or less the invisible God and to set upon earthly objects – idols – the affections and reverence which properly belong to him. Joshua would incite the people to a good resolution.

Just so, too, we see that spiritual Israelites need frequently to incite one another to faithfulness to God, to an appreciation of what he has done for us and what he rightly expects of us, and to caution one another against what we recognize to be the tendencies of the world – the drawing away of our hearts and affections toward earthly things.

The Israelites had come into a land whose people practiced idolatry accompanied by a lascivious form of worship, and there the laws of God upon them would necessarily mean restraint against which their fallen natures would more or less rebel, and Joshua wished them to have these matters well before their minds and to decide the question of loyalty to God in full view of the facts as they already realized them, or would subsequently appreciate them; on the one hand were the license and attractions of the sensuous forms of idolatry and the pleasures of sin such as they are, for a season, with divine disfavor; on the other hand were the restraints of the divine law accompanied by divine favor, protection and care, relating not only to the present life, but to that also which is to come. He inquired whether it seemed evil – that is undesirable – to them to be Israelites, to be God's people, to be under the restraints of his laws in order to have his favor and

blessing. They would as a people now be tested along this line individually and nationally, and he desired to anticipate the coming tests and trials of their faith and obedience by fortifying their minds and leading them to make a decision one way or another. Then as a leader he took his own position most positively on the side of the Lord, saying, "As for me and my house (my family) we will serve the Lord."

Many would be inclined to doubt the wisdom of setting before the people such a choice; they would be inclined, on the contrary, to leave no choice about it, but to insist and demand that the Lord be recognized and obeyed at all hazards. But really Joshua was merely emphasizing the choice which God puts before people continually; he leaves them open to choose good or evil, – to serve him, or to serve self or sin or wealth or other idols. As a matter of fact we have no right to attempt compulsion, because the Lord leaves the matter open for choice, as Joshua did; he is seeking those who desire to be his servants, his royal priesthood, his holy nation, his peculiar people; those who do not so desire he does not desire, and he is not calling them and drawing them now. Our Master emphasized this lesson in his preaching, saying to the Jews, "If any man will come after me (as a disciple), let him take up his cross and follow me"; he exhorts them furthermore to sit down and count the cost of discipleship before undertaking to make a choice, just as Joshua in this lesson drew before the minds of his hearers something of the two sides of the question which he exhorts them to decide properly on the Lord's side, – on the side of life and peace and blessing and the promises of God.

Although this matter of choosing was left open to the people during the Jewish age, and under the still higher call during this Gospel age, yet it will not be so left open during the Millennial Age; men will not then be invited to choose whom they will serve and worship; on the contrary, when the Kingdom has been established, the law shall go forth, and without asking for the preferences of any for good or for evil, obedience will be enforced and the evilly disposed will be forcibly restrained. Such a reign of law and order will be maintained

and those who will not conform thereto will be chastened as well as instructed, and all who shall not come into accord with that Kingdom and its law of righteousness outwardly, and ultimately conform to it heartily, will be cut off in the Second Death. – Acts 3:23.

The people responded nobly, that they appreciated God's care and blessings and that they would be faithful and loyal to him; but realizing that promises are easily made and need to be deeply impressed, Joshua repeated the injunction the second time (verse 19) saying in substance: Ye can not serve the Lord easily, – you must not imagine that the promises you are making can be kept without considerable effort, **[R3094 : page 315]** neither must you imagine that a partial perfunctory observance of the divine law will please the Lord or have his blessing, – he is a jealous God. As a husband or wife having entered into the marriage relationship would properly be jealous of any intrusion or indifference or coldness, so the Lord having accepted Israel as his peculiar people would watch over them with a jealous care, would not be indifferent if they divided their affections or worship as between him and others. And God is the same today and forever, and wishes his Spiritual Israel to understand that to abide in his love means obedience to his regulations, all of which are reasonable services. He would have us understand, clearly, that while he has favored us by lifting our feet from the horrible pit and miry clay of sin, condemnation and death, and has reckonedly justified us, placing our feet upon the rock, Christ Jesus, – although he has adopted us into his family as sons robed in Christ's righteousness, accepted in the Beloved one, nevertheless, having done these favors for us he would disown us and cast us off as unworthy of further favor if we deliberately prove unfaithful to him.

As the Israelites re-affirmed their decision to be faithful to the Lord so let us Spiritual Israelites engrave deeply upon our hearts our consecration, and let us frequently revive and review that consecration that the cares of life do not obliterate it to any degree.

But these two exhortations and two responses were still not enough for Joshua, for a third time, as still further and more deeply impressing the lesson, he exhorted them not only to put away all thought of idolatry, but, on the other hand, to incline their hearts to the Lord. It is after we have become God's people through justifying faith, after he has called us no longer servants, but sons, that he speaks to us, saying, "My son give me thine heart." To give the heart to the Lord means a full consecration of the will and hence of every hope, ambition and interest; and this is really the only way in which we can assure ourselves that no form of worldly idolatry will have any place in our lives. If we merely attempt to serve the Lord in an outward way ceremoniously and nominally, it will be but a little while until insidiously the world, the flesh and the Adversary will draw our attention and energies away from the Lord to various things, entangling them in various earthly alliances and worships that will mean spiritual poverty and luke-warmness, if not absolute coldness of heart towards the Lord. Let us, therefore, like those addressed by Joshua, reach a positive decision once for all; and whatever it may cost and however seductive and beautiful the service and worship of self or Mammon may appear to us, let us, in view of the experiences of the past and the promises which reach into the future, decide that we will serve the Lord; not waiting for him to raise his hands in judgments and denunciations, but listening for his voice that we may know his will and do it.

There were three witnesses to this contract or covenant. The first was the people themselves who would now long remember this covenant thrice repeated. The second was Joshua's declaration, in connection probably with the tables of the Law, that Israel's covenant was renewed by statute and ordinance – that the original covenant of Sinai had been ratified, reaffirmed. The third witness was a monumental stone which he "erected under an oak" [or oak grove] that was about [near] the sanctuary of the Lord. This also would be a witness to them of what they had done – of their pledge to the Lord in the presence of Joshua. So it is well for the Lord's spiritual people to

do more than merely make a covenant or agreement with the Lord in their hearts and minds. That decision of the mind is important first; but it needs besides helps, such for instance, as a confession of it before the fellow members of the body of Christ, the Church; and it needs some memorial of it, as for instance in the baptismal memorial of consecration unto death.

Because of our weaknesses through the fall, and because of the seductions of the Adversary and the world, we need to hedge about the new creature and its good resolutions so that we may be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Let every true Israelite adopt the words of Joshua "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," and as this would mean no light matter for himself so, also, it should be no meaningless phrase as respects his household; it should mean that his children shall be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; it should mean that minor children shall not be allowed to rule the house nor to discredit parents outside the home, but that the parental influence exercised in kindness, in love and in firmness, shall seek to bring the children of each family so far as possible into covenant relationship to the Lord, instructing them in the way of the Lord, both by precept and example.

