

Tuesday

December 23

Free to Serve

As a true and faithful leader, Joshua respects the free will of his people and wishes that Israel would serve the Lord out of free choice rather than compulsion. That was exactly the point made by the deliberate use of the verb "chosen" (*see Josh. 24:22*)

And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

In other passages *bakhar*, "to choose," describes Yahweh's election of Israel (*Deut. 7:6, 7; Deut. 10:15; Deut. 14:2*). Israel is free to say "no" to Yahweh after their divine election, but that would be nonsensical and absurd. Israel can say "yes" to God and continue to live, or they can turn their backs on Him and cease to exist.

What was Israel's response to Joshua's appeal? (*Josh. 24:16-18*). **Why do you think Joshua reacted to their answer in the way he did?** (*Josh. 24:19-21*).

In their categorically positive answer, the Israelites recognize that the God of the patriarchs and of their fathers is now also "our God" (*Josh. 24:17, 18, NKJV*), whom they are willing to serve with undivided allegiance. After such an unquestionable affirmation of their loyalty, we would expect words of affirmation and encouragement from Joshua. However, this is not the case. The dialogue between Joshua and the people takes a radical turn in which Joshua seems to play the role of the devil's advocate. He shifts from speaking about God's gracious providence in the past to threatening the Israelites with a picture of a God who is not easy to serve. WHY?

Joshua knows the instability of the first generation, who promised to obey God in similar terms (*Exod. 19:8, Exod. 24:3, Deut. 5:27*), yet who forgot their promises while the words were still on their lips (*Exodus 32*). Thus, Joshua, by means of rhetoric, wants to make the Israelites aware of several things. First, the decision to serve God is a serious one. It will have to shape the entire nation according to God's revelation. The blessings of pursuing that goal are evident, but the

consequences of disobedience must also be fully understood.

Forgiveness of sins is not an inalienable right of humanity but a miracle of God's grace.

Second, the decision of the Israelites to serve God must be their own decision, not something imposed by a leader, even Joshua.

Third, Israel must realize that humans cannot serve God in their own strength. Serving God is not achieved by a mechanical adherence to the stipulations of the covenant but by a personal relationship with the saving Lord (compare with Exod. 20:1, 2; Deut. 5:6, 7).

THIS THIRD REASON IS PRESENT TRUTH. THE NEW OR EVERLASTING COVENANT IS GOD'S CENTRAL NEED AND GOD'S GOAL FOR EVERY BELIEVER. THIS IS WAY THE BIBLE DEDICATES SO MUCH SPACE TO EXPLAINING THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE NEW AND THE OLD COVENANT (GALATIANS 4, HEBREWS 8:6-13). WARNS US ABOUT THE LITTLE HORN POWER OF DANIEL THAT WOULD RAGE AGAINST THE HOLY COVENANT BY CHANGING GODS TIMES AND LAWS AND SETTING UP A COUNTERFEIT PRIESTHOOD ON EARTH (DANIEL 11:30; 8:11, 12; 7:25).

A MECHANICAL ADHERENCE TO THE STIPULATIONS OF THE COVENANT WITHOUT A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS THE EPITOME OF THE LAODICEAN CONDITION. RELIGIOUS PEOPLE ARE EXPERT AT SAYING, "ALL

THAT THE LORD HAS SAID WE WILL DO AND BE OBEDIENT" WHILE FAILING
TO KNOW HOW TO OBEY.

GOD'S PEOPLE TALK ABOUT OBEYING BUT DON'T OBEY.

THE TALK IS SUPPLIED IN PLACE OF THE OBEDIENCE.

THE MORE GOD'S PEOPLE TALK ABOUT OBEYING THE LESS THEY FEEL THE
NEED TO OBEY.

THE MORE THEY DEFEND THE TALKING ABOUT OBEYING THE MORE
RIGHTEOUS THEY FEEL WITHOUT OBEYING.

THE MORE THEY CONTRAST THEIR TALKING WITH THE TALKING OF OTHER
RELIGIONS THE MORE JUSTIFIED THEY FEEL THAT THEIR TALKING IS THE
CORRECT TALKING WHILE THE TALKING OF OTHER RELIGIONS IS THE
WRONG TALKING WHILE THEY STILL FAIL TO OBEY.

FINALLY THERE WILL COME A DAY WHEN ALL THEIR TALKING WILL AMOUNT
TO NOTHING BUT A SUBSTITUTE FOR ACTUAL HEART OBEDIENCE. IN THAT
DAY ALL THE WRONG TALKING OF MANY OF THE OTHER RELIGIOUS PEOPLE
WHOM THEY HAD JUDGED FOR THEIR WRONG TALKING WILL BE DISCARDED
FOR THE RIGHT TALKING AND ADDED TO THE HEART OBEDIENCE THAT HAS
ALWAYS BEEN AT THE ROOT OF THEIR WRONG TALKING.

MORALITY IS GOOD BUT ITS NOT RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH - AS NOTED
BY THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES OF CHRIST'S DAY - A TALKING
ADHERENCE TO GODS WORD (WITHOUT HEART SURRENDER) LEADS TO A
HATRED OF A WALKING OBEDIENCE AS IT WAS MANIFESTED IN THE LIFE

OF JESUS CHRIST. SO IT HAS BEEN THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES AND SO
IT WILL BE IN THE FINAL CRISIS.

EZEKIEL DESCRIBES THEIR EXPERIENCE THIS WAY: **EZEKIEL 36:21-32:**

But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had
profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say
unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this
for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's
sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.
And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the
heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the
heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when
I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take
you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries,
and will bring you into your own land.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be
clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I
cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit
will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out
of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will
put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes,
and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell

in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my
people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all
your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will
increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the
fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall
receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall
ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not
good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your
iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I
this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and
confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.

