

Stay Faithful to God, Serve the Lord

SCOTT HOEZEE

All throughout history, significant leaders have given a farewell address. One of the most famous in American history was from the first president, George Washington. But the Bible has many such farewells, too, from people like Moses and David. Even Jesus had some parting things to say in the Olivet discourses in the days shortly before his arrest and crucifixion. Well, today on *Groundwork*, we come to the end of Joshua's life, and we will see his last testament to the people. Often, what is most important to a person comes out in their words of farewell, and as we will see, that certainly is the case with Joshua. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, with this program, we are coming to the end of a six-part series on the book of Joshua; and if you have been paying close attention to this series, then you may recognize in this program we are jumping from where we left off in the fifth program in Joshua 10 and 11, all the way to the last two chapters of the book, in Joshua 23 and 24; and if anyone listening to this is wondering what happened in the intervening chapters, we can tell you that those are many, many long and detailed chapters devoted to just one thing, Darrell, and that was the dividing up of the Promised Land among the twelve tribes of Israel.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is some really important material for us to understand the division of labor and how that works out in the history of Israel. What happens if they happen to lose the land; or what happens in the future when they have these problems with people attacking them and things like that? So, God is still, in essence, trying to show how he is working out the details of the promise that he kept.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, the chapters look a little dull, and they aren't the most inspiring reading...let's just admit it. Even those details, granular though it gets as to what tribe gets this allotment of land on this side of this creek or this river, it is all part of the fulfillment of God's promise; and it is supposed to be in perpetuity, as you just said, Darrell. You know, in the future, things might happen; people fall into debt and they have to sell off a parcel of land to pay for something; but that was never supposed to happen in perpetuity. Every fifty years was the year of the Jubilee, and they were supposed to reset the clock, right? If you had some property foreclosed on, you were supposed to get it back, or your descendants were. Probably Israel never actually did that, but the point being, when God divided up the land in Joshua, in Chapters 12 to 22, it was important and it was supposed to be permanent.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I think it is one way that God would kind of reset the economy so that they could start again with a fresh slate; but as we look into these scriptures today, we want to talk about how, as you said in the intro, Joshua's farewell address, and it picks up in Chapter 23; and it says this: After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, ²summoned all

Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am very old. ³You 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. ⁴Remember 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 Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶Be 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. ⁷Do 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. ⁸But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

So, these are the last words of Joshua. We believe that they were recorded faithfully; but we also know that the final written form of Joshua probably didn't happen for a long time...maybe even some centuries later. It was more of an oral tradition before it got written down; but that means, Darrell, that by the time these final words of Joshua were written down in their final form, Israel had already been guilty of doing everything Joshua just told them not to do.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is really crazy how whoever wrote these in the book of Joshua after Joshua was gone, decided to bookend what God said to Joshua in Chapter 1. So, he is repeating back everything that God said, and he is giving them the same promises, or the charge, that God gave them in the beginning; and unfortunately, if they are in a situation now where they have forsaken God...where they have turned to the right and to the left...they would probably be feeling a little sheepish reading this or hearing this read to them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because they made a huge mistake. God told them to root out the religions of the Canaanites. You know, the altars to Baal, the altars to Asherah, these fertility gods of the Canaanites. Get rid of them, God said. Get rid of the high places where their temples of worship were, and they didn't. They left some of them, and guess what? Exactly what Joshua feared happened, they got ensnared and they started to worship Baal and Asherah; or maybe not worshipping them instead of the God of Israel, but alongside of...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We call that syncretism, where you take your own religion and then you start blending in a little of that and a little of that, a dash of this, a dash of that; and you end up with a false faith. So, that did happen.

DARRELL DELANEY

When Jesus is talking about the salt losing its saltiness, I think he is kind of thinking about that because of the mixture of worshipping God and money or God and mammon. In the Old Testament, we see here in this book that God tells them to drive completely out everyone, and there are some verses that say they didn't drive them completely out, but they left them here, they left them there; and those people had their own worship; and that worship got confused with what they were doing with God. It began a horrible cycle after this book of how they went to the wrong gods; they repented, they came back; they went to the wrong gods, repented and came back; and God had to intervene every time to deliver them. So, it doesn't happen in the book of Joshua, but it does happen later on in scripture.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What makes it worse, and we talked about this in the previous episode in this series, in episode 5, where God makes it clear that God is the one who gave them this land. Yes, they fought. They had to do stuff, of course;

but it was ultimately God. In fact, we just read that in verse 4 of Chapter 23, where God says: The nations I conquered...not you...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I conquered them, God says through Joshua; and so, now Joshua says: so don't turn around and slap God in the face. You are living in the land of grace. You are living in the land of promise that God gave you. How could you possibly turn around and worship the Baals and Asherah and the religions of the Canaanites and these other nations? What an insult; what a slap to God in the face; and yet, that is exactly what happened. Again, if the people heard these words decades or even centuries after Joshua spoke these words, they must have kind of looked down at their shoes in shame...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because they know...or they should have known...that that is exactly what happened in Israel, and it leads to all kinds of mayhem in future times.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, what God does when he is getting ready to bring his judgment, he usually gives you the track record of what he has done for you: After all I have done for you; I brought you out of Egypt, I delivered you, I fed you in the desert, I brought you to this Promised Land, and this is the thanks I get. So, God is actually trying to make sure that they continue in the area of faithfulness, and Joshua is reminding them of how God has been faithful; but in just a moment, we are going to hear more words from his farewell address, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this sixth and final episode in a series we have been doing on the book of Joshua; and Darrell, we were just listening to Joshua's farewell address from the second-to-the-last chapter of this book, Joshua 23. Let's get right back to it. Joshua continues; we are picking it up here at Joshua 23:14. Joshua says:

"Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.

¹⁵But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. ¹⁶If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he had given you."

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really interesting when you read those verses that it echoes to me back to what God told Moses in Deuteronomy 28. He says: If you obey me, you will be blessed in the city, blessed in the field, blessed when you come, blessed when you go; if you disobey me, you will be cursed, and other nations will come in and draw you out...and things like that. So, the law of divine retribution looks like it is in place here, where if you obey God, you are blessed; if you disobey God, you are cursed. This mentality that he has here is something that Israel has believed for centuries, even to the point where when Jesus saw the man born blind, they asked him: Somebody must have sinned; who sinned? Was it because he did or his parents did? And Jesus said: Neither; this happened so that the glory of God could be fulfilled. So, God's covenant promises go both ways in this book.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it does remind us—Joshua words here—when I was in seminary, if you go to any seminary, eventually you are going to hear the phrase: Promise and fulfillment. In biblical theology courses in seminary and in Bible schools—Bible colleges—that is a summary for scripture. What is the Bible? It is a whole series of promise and fulfillment. God is always promising and then always fulfilling. We are a people who serve a God of promise...a God who makes promises. All of our lives are founded on the very promises of God, right? I mean, it goes all the way back, right, Darrell? God promised Adam and Eve after they sinned: Somebody is going to come to take care of this...

DARRELL DELANEY

Genesis 3:15.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And deal with this serpent-like tempter; yes. And then God promised Abraham he would become the father of a great nation, through whom all of the nations would be blessed. God made promises to David, he would always have an heir sitting on the throne. In Isaiah we get a promise that a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting Father, a Prince of Peace would be born one day; and God made promises through Jeremiah that he would take our hearts of stone and replace them with soft hearts of flesh that were tender enough to receive the grace of God. God is a God of promise.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he is a God of fulfillment because he is not just making promises to make promises, he is making promises so that he can fulfill them and show how faithful he is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Even though he is God, and God all by himself does not need to prove himself...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He often shows himself to be trustworthy that we might trust in him; and so, his character he is willing to put on the line; his nature he is willing to put on the line to show that he is worthy to be worshipped, to be praised, to be trusted; and he did that all through this Bible, and he has done it in this book; and Joshua is reminding the people he is a God of promise; he is a God of fulfillment; and he is not going to stop today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The things that have happened lately, Joshua says, didn't come out of nowhere. They were the fulfillment of promises that go way, way, way back; certainly to Abraham, but even in a way, to Adam and Eve. Here is the good news too, that even in the New Testament, Darrell, this doesn't stop. In fact, the New Testament says that all of God's promises found their *yes* in Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

Amen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

And even Jesus doesn't stop, right? Jesus promises at the end of Matthew to stay with us always. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, lures people into salvation in Jesus' name by saying: The *promise* is for you and for your children and for all who are afar off. We continue to live on the promises of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important for us as believers to remember that. If he is a God who has not changed; he is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore, we can trust him in uncertain times because he has been a God of promise and fulfillment; and Jesus Christ has been a God of promise and fulfillment; and he gave us the Holy Spirit, who works with us and in us to help continue to work that promise and fulfillment; and we are part of that promise and fulfillment because he is faithful to complete the work that he started in us, which is what he says in Philippians 1:6. And there are promises yet to be fulfilled, especially at his second coming...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Which we are looking forward to. So, he is not done yet; and the good news is: Because he has been faithful all that time, even through these stories in the Bible, which are our stories, too, he can do it today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But as you pointed out a few moments ago, Darrell, there is a flipside to the promise, because God also promises that if you worship other gods...if you trample on the poor...you break my covenant, I promise you this: You are going to inherit, not a promised land; you are going to inherit a world of hurt. You will be punished. As we know, that happens in Israel. We did a series on Ezekiel some while back here on *Groundwork*, Darrell, and we saw this terrible chapter...Chapters 10 and 11 of Ezekiel, where Ezekiel sees the glory of God leaving Jerusalem and the Temple and literally heading to the hills to the east. Israel's sin was so bad that God had to abandon them for a time; and God promised them that that would happen, and it did. That is a terrible, terrible thing, of course. The good news for us as Christians is that we now know that we don't live under that threat because Jesus took it all for us; but, the punishment...Isaiah says...the punishment of us all was laid on him. He bore the iniquities of all of us. So, it is not as though in the New Testament the promise for punishment totally disappears...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It just doesn't hit us anymore; by grace, it hit Jesus on our behalf.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, what you mentioned there, it reminds me of the fact that the eternal punishment of death and separation from God forever has been dealt with through the atonement of Christ; but it doesn't mean that the prisoner who murdered someone is going to just be pardoned. They might have to serve their life sentence in jail...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

They can be forgiven by Jesus because they repented of that sin, but there still are consequences and punishments that go with certain sins on this earth while we live here, but the eternal separation from God has been atoned for through Christ, so we don't have to worry about that once we repent; but it doesn't mean that we won't have any natural lasting consequences on this life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; because we know that we live. As we said earlier, Darrell, one phrase you might hear if you go to seminary is promise and fulfillment sums up the scripture. Another phrase that we hear a lot in seminary is:

The already and the not yet.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The kingdom has already come, and yet, it has not yet come fully...not yet. So, we live between the times in the already and the not yet; and that is why, Darrell, what you said earlier is so true. We are still living on the promises. It is not fully here. We believe it is as good as done; we know Jesus is coming again; but it is not yet; and so, for now we see loved ones suffer sickness, dear people die, the world seems to be falling apart sometimes. There is poverty and sorrow and hunger and war; and that is why we pray: Maranatha; come, Lord Jesus! But we know he will. We pray that also in the firm hope of the promise. But there are just a couple final details in Joshua 24, the last chapter. We will take that up next as we conclude both this program and this series. Stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and now we are going to go to the last chapter of Joshua, Chapter 24; and we have seen that in his farewell address, which is covered in Joshua 23, Joshua warns the people not to break God's law; and above all, not to slip into idolatry and the worship of the false gods left over from the Canaanites; but Darrell, before the book ends, Joshua is going to bring it...he is going to get up in their face.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; he is going to get up in their face and challenge them to promise future obedience with this, what you would call a covenant renewal at Shechem, and he is going to make sure that they understand the commitment that they are actually signing up for...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

There are conditions to this Promised Land, and how they should live; and you pick it up here in Chapter 24, reading at verse 16; it says: Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other Gods!"¹⁷ It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from the land of the slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled.¹⁸ And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.¹⁹ Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins."²⁰ If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."²¹ But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the Lord."²² Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, a little holy sarcasm here. Joshua says to the people: Nah; I don't believe you. You folks cannot be faithful to God. Just admit it now. So, he kind of throws down the gauntlet and the people roar back. I always like it when it says: The people said... Like really; all of them in unison? Well, maybe. The people said: Oh, no, no; we'll be faithful...we will...we will...we will. All right; well, Joshua says, it's your funeral if you don't live up to it, because I am going to write this down now, and God is going to hold you to it, even long

after I am dead.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, they make these commitments at Shechem. They say: We can do it; we will do it. I mean, if you read the Bible, you know that no one can fully fulfill and perfectly keep God's laws and commandments; and they are going to need some help eventually, when they stray away from that. This went on for a while. We actually continue reading here in Joshua 24:31. It says: Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord [God] had done for Israel. So, they did live faithfully while Joshua was alive. It went off the rails after that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and the other elders who outlived even Joshua. So, meh... Not quite a generation, let's say; but we know which book of the Bible is next: Judges; and what is the theme of Judges? Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. They lived as though God didn't exist; and we live in a world where that is still true, but be that as it may, it was never supposed to be true in Israel, but it didn't happen. Therein lies the great tragedy of the history of Israel.

For now, let's just pick up a couple final lines from the book. So, now we are still in Joshua 24 at verse 29: After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten.³⁰ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.³² And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants.

So, here, Darrell, we get some nice closure that goes all the way back to the Bible's first book...to Genesis and to Joseph.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is really beautiful how they 1) glorified God; and 2) they honored Joseph by bringing him out of the foreign land in which he had died and brought him into the Promised Land. So, he literally got to be in the Promised Land...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Even after he was gone; and so, they actually honored him, and that also helps fulfill the promise that God made to Abraham about land and descendants. Now they are both in the same place. They got the land; they got the descendants; and then the rest of the descendants will also live there as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the last words of the book of Genesis are: A coffin in Egypt, which is kind of an ominous way to end the book. That's referring to Joseph. He died and they put him in a coffin in Egypt. Ooh, that is a little bit of a suspenseful note. But the people eventually bring that coffin with them out of Egypt on the exodus; and so, right; we have kind of come full circle; and I think, Darrell, if this particular program has had a theme, it is promises. God is the God of promise; and as you just said, this little passing reference to the bones of Joseph and being buried in the Promised Land on land that Jacob had originally...Joseph's father Jacob...had originally bought long ago. Boy, it has really come around to it. So, that really is the theme of this program; and really, I guess we could say it is the theme of the book of Joshua, that God is a God who keeps his promises.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important for us to remember that very nature of God, that he is a promise keeper; that he is a covenant keeper; and that can encourage us today, even when we go through times that are uncertain; or even setbacks in our lives, when we lose loved ones or we lose a job or things change in our lives. There could be

good things that happen. I am a new husband, a new father, a new spouse; I am a new... we have adopted some children; we have had a retirement. Whatever things are happening, we need to remember the consistent character of our God, who remains faithful in his promises, and he has done all of that through the work of Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it goes back, as we are reminded here, to Abraham. A long shot pair of senior citizens, and God says: I am going to make of you a mighty nation; and yet, we now see that; and now we see that.

I would like to end with this fanciful character sketch of Abraham that the writer Frederick Buechner once wrote in his book: *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who*. So, Buechner imagines Abraham late in this life at a family gathering, and he is obviously mixing in contemporary imagery, but here is what Buechner wrote: In spite of everything, Abraham never stopped having faith that God was going to keep his promise about making him the father of a great nation. Night after night, it was the dream he rode to sleep on. There was a group photograph he had taken not long before he died. It was a bar mitzvah, and they were all there, down to the last poor relation. They weren't a great nation yet by a long shot, but you would never know it from the way Abraham sits enthroned there in his velvet yarmulke with several great grandchildren on his lap. Even through his thick lenses, you can read the look of faith in his eye. They will all be winners, God willing, says the old man's eyes. Someday, who knows? I will be talking about my son, the Light of the world. Thanks be to God for the God who always keeps his promises, to Joshua, to Israel, through Jesus, and now to us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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Printed on February 5, 2025