

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Joshua, being old, calls for the rulers and different heads of the Israelites, Joshua 23:1, Joshua 23:2, to whom he relates how God had put them in possession of the promised land, Joshua 23:3, Joshua 23:4; from which all their remaining enemies should be expelled, Joshua 23:5. Exhorts them to be faithful to God, and to avoid all connections with the idolatrous nations, Joshua 23:6-8. Encourages them with the strongest promises, that no enemy should ever be able to prevail against them, if they continued to love the Lord their God, Joshua 23:9-11. Lays also before them the consequences of disobedience, Joshua 23:12, Joshua 23:13. Shows them that as all God's promises had been fulfilled to them while they were obedient, so his threatening should be fulfilled on them if they revolted from his service; and that if they did so, they should be utterly destroyed from off the good land, Joshua 23:14-16.

Verse 1

A long time after that the Lord had given rest - This is supposed to have been in the last or one hundred and tenth year of the life of Joshua, about thirteen or fourteen years after the conquest of Canaan, and seven after the division of the land among the tribes.

Verse 2

Joshua called for all Israel - There are four degrees of civil distinction mentioned here:

1. זְקֵנִים (zekenim), the elders or senate, the Princes of the tribes.
2. רָשִׁים (rashim) or (rashey aboth), the Chiefs or Heads of families.
3. שֹׁפְטִים (shophetim), the Judges who interpreted and decided according to the law.
4. שְׂרָרִים (shoterim), the Officers, serjeants, etc., who executed the decisions of the judges.

Whether this assembly was held at Timnath-serah, where Joshua lived, or at Shiloh, where the ark was, or at Shechem, as in Joshua 24:1, we cannot tell. Some think that the meaning here, and that mentioned in Joshua 24:1, were the same, and if so, Shechem was the place of assembling; but it is more likely that the two chapters treat of two distinct assemblies, whether held at the same place or not.

Verse 3

For the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you - There is much both of piety and modesty in this address. It was natural for the Israelites to look on their veteran, worn-out general, who had led them on from conquest to conquest, with profound respect; and to be ready to say, "Had we not had such a commander, we had never got possession of this good land." Joshua corrects this opinion, and shows them that all their enemies had been defeated, because the Lord their God had fought for them. That the battle was the Lord's, and not his; and that God alone should have the glory.

Verse 4

I have divided - these nations that remain - The whole of the promised land had been portioned out, as well those parts which had not yet been conquered, as those from which the ancient inhabitants had been expelled. The Canaanitish armies had long ago been broken in pieces, so that they could make no head against the Israelites, but in many districts the old inhabitants remained, more through the supineness of the Israelites, than through their own bravery.

From Jordan - unto the great sea - All the land that lay between the river Jordan, from Phiala, where it rose, to the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, and to the Mediterranean Sea, through the whole extent of its coast, opposite to Jordan.

Verse 5

And drive them - out - and ye shall possess - The same Hebrew word יָרַשׁ (yarash) is used here to signify to expel from an inheritance, and to succeed those thus expelled. Ye shall disinherit them from your sight, and ye shall inherit their land.

Verse 6

Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do, etc. - It requires no small courage to keep a sound creed in the midst of scoffers, and not less to maintain a godly practice among the profane and profligate.

That is written in the book - By the word of God alone his followers are bound. Nothing is to be received as an article of faith which God has not spoken.

Verse 7

Come not among these nations - Have no civil or social contracts with them, (see Joshua 23:12), as these will infallibly lead to spiritual affinities, in consequence of which ye will make honorable mention of the name of their gods, swear by them as the judges of your motives and actions, serve them in their abominable rites, and bow yourselves unto them as your creators and preservers; thus giving the whole worship of God to idols: and all this will follow from simply coming among them. He who walks in the counsel of the ungodly will soon stand in the way of sinners, and shortly sit in the seat of the scornful. Nemo repente fuit turpissimus. "No man rises to the highest stages of iniquity but by degrees." Nero himself, under the instructions of Seneca, was a promising youth.

Verse 10

One man of you shall chase a thousand - Do not remain inactive on the supposition that you must be much more numerous before you can drive out your enemies, for it is the Lord that shall drive out nations great and strong; and under his direction and influence one of you shall chase a thousand.

Verse 11

Take good heed - unto yourselves that ye love the Lord - נֶפֶשׁ נֶפֶשׁ (lenaphshotheychem), Take heed To Your Souls, literally; but נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh) and (nefs), both in Hebrew and Arabic, signify the whole self, as well as soul and life; both soul and body must be joined in this work, for it is written, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Verse 12

Else if ye do - go back - The soldier who draws back when going to meet the enemy, forfeits his life. These were the Lord's soldiers, and if they drew back they drew back unto perdition, their lives being forfeited by their infidelity.

Verse 13

They shall be snares - נֶפֶשׁ (lephach), a net or gin, set by the artful fowler to catch heedless birds.

And traps - מֶקֶשׁ (mokesh), any snare, toil, or trap, placed on the ground to catch the unwary traveler or wild beast by the foot.

Scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes - Nothing can be conceived more vexatious and distressing than a continual goad in the side, or thorn in the eye. They will drive you into obedience to their false gods, and put out the eyes of your understandings by their idolatries. And God will preserve them merely to distress and punish you.

Verse 14

The way of all the earth - I am about to die; I am going into the grave.

Not one thing hath failed, etc. - God had so remarkably and literally fulfilled his promises, that not one of his enemies could state that even the smallest of them had not had its most literal accomplishment: this all Israel could testify.

Verse 15

So shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things - His faithfulness in fulfilling his promises is a proof that he will as faithfully accomplish his threatenings, for the veracity of God is equally pledged for both.

Verse 16

Ye shall perish quickly from off the good land - The following note from Mr. John Trapp is very judicious: "This judgment Joshua inculcates Joshua 23:13, Joshua 23:15, and here, because he knew it would be a very grievous thing to them to forego so goodly a land, so lately gotten, and so short a while enjoyed. In the beginning of a speech יְהוָה, the milder affections, suit best; but towards the end יְהוָה, passionate and piercing passages; according to the orator. This rule Joshua observes, being Ex utroque Caesar; no less an orator than a warrior."

In all this exhortation we see how closely Joshua copies the example of his great master Moses. See Leviticus 26:7, Leviticus 26:8, Leviticus 26:14, etc.; Deuteronomy 28:7; Deuteronomy 32:30. He was tenderly concerned

for the welfare of the people, and with a deeply affected heart he spoke to their hearts. No people ever were more fairly and fully warned, and no people profited less by it. The threatenings pronounced here were accomplished in the Babylonish captivity, but more fully in their general dispersion since the crucifixion of our Lord. And should not every Christian fear when he reads, If God spared not the natural branches, take heed that he spare not thee? Surely a worldly, carnal, and godless Christian has no more reason to expect indulgence from the justice of God than a profligate Jew. We have a goodly land, but the justice of God can decree a captivity from it, or a state of bondage in it. The privileges that are abused are thereby forfeited. And this is as applicable to the individual as to the whole system.