

# Adult Teaching Resources

August 25, 2024



## Some Things Never Change

August 4, 2024— “What Is It?”—Exodus 16 (RCL 16:2-4, 9-15)

August 11, 2024— “Call and Response”—Psalm 34 (RCL 34:1-8)

August 18, 2024— “Listen to Lady Wisdom”—Proverbs 9 (RCL 9:1-6)

**August 25, 2024— “Make Your Choice!”—Joshua 24:1-25 (RCL 24:1-2a, 14-18)**

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# Make Your Choice!

*Joshua 24:1-25 (RCL 24:1-2a, 14-18)*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Key Verse

*Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. (Josh. 24:15)*

### Opening

After everyone arrives, form small groups of 3-4. Once each group is settled, ask these questions for small group discussion and conversation.

What is one decision you have already had to make today?  
Why did you choose what you did?  
What are the consequences of the choice you made?

Give each group time to talk, then ask these questions for small group discussion and conversation.

What is one of the biggest decisions you've had to make?  
Why did you choose what you did?  
What are the consequences of the choice you made?

Give each group time to talk, then open the floor for volunteers to share with the larger group.

### Reading the Bible

Who did Joshua summon after gathering all the tribes of Israel? (the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel)

What did they do? (They presented themselves before God)

What did Joshua say to all the people? ("Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.)

What did Joshua tell the people to do? (revere the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness)

What are the people to do with the other gods? (put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the Lord)

## Reading the Bible *continued*

What did Joshua say the people were to do if they were unwilling to serve the Lord? (choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living)

What was Joshua's decision? (as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.)

What did the people say to reassure Joshua? (Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods)

What did they say about God? (it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went and among all the peoples through whom we passed, and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land)

What did the people decide? (we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.)

## Making Connections

How important is it to you to make a choice and stand by your decision? Why do you say that? How do you feel about others who stick by their decisions? How do you feel about those who aren't as firm with their decisions?

Our Lesson Writer explains, "Joshua's speech amounts to a summary review of the theology propounded most clearly in Deuteronomy, a straightforward belief that Yahweh would bless Israel so long as the people remained faithful but would punish them if they turned to other gods." What have you been taught, and what is your belief about how God treats (or blesses) us based on our faithfulness? Where did you learn that? How has that belief informed your relationship with God?

What is the most significant covenant/agreement/contract you have been a part of? How much thought did you put into being a participant in that relationship? How have you benefitted from being a part of that agreement?

Have you ever been part of a covenant/agreement/contract renewal? What happened with the original relationship? Who instigated the renewal? How have you benefitted from being a part of the new agreement?

Our Lesson Writer shares, "Joshua's purpose was to lead a covenant renewal ceremony that would remind the people of their ongoing obligations if they wished to remain in a positive relationship with God." Have you ever felt the need to have a covenant renewal with God? What are you willing to share about that experience?

Our Lesson Writer tells us that treaties had six elements: "Such treaties had six typical elements: (1) the ruling king is identified by name; (2) the king's "gracious acts" to the conquered are recited; (3) the vassal's covenant obligations are enumerated; (4) the document is placed in a public sanctuary with instructions for periodic reading; (5) the gods of the parties involved are invoked as witnesses; and (6) blessings are promised for obedience to the

## Making Connections *continued*

treaty, while penalties are listed for those who rebel.” If you had a treaty written between you and God, what elements would you want? What would you require? What would be required of you?

Do you think a treaty, or formal document, between an individual and God would enhance the relationship or hamper the relationship? Why do you say that? In what ways do you think it could enhance the relationship? In what ways do you think it could hamper the relationship?

## So What?

Ask everyone to gather back together in their small groups from the beginning of the lesson. In thinking about the ancient treaties and their hope to keep people faithful to the One, True God, ask these questions for each small group to discuss.

What choices have we made that might cause God to be a bit concerned about our faithfulness?

What choices have we made that relieve and concern God might have about our faithfulness?

What gods should we be most concerned about as we try to focus and worship the One, true God?

How does our infidelity affect our relationship with God?

What does God expect from us in our relationship with God?

What does God require of us in our relationship with God?

Do you think those qualifications should be formally recorded? Why do you say that?

What do we expect from God in our relationship?

What do we require from God in our relationship?

Do you think those qualifications should be formally recorded? Why do you say that?

Give each group time to discuss and share with each other, then open the door for large group conversation and discussion.

## The Challenge

This week, focus on the decisions you make and how your decisions affect the agreement you have made to follow and be faithful to God.

## Prayer

Loving God, like those who have come before us, we struggle to remain totally and completely faithful to you. We confess that we bow down to others gods and give them more time, energy, and resources than we offer you. Renew our hearts, open our eyes, and create in us a new covenant so that we will continue to be your people. Amen.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**The real story?**—The real story of how the Israelites spread through the land of Canaan is unknown to us. Several passages in the book of Joshua speak as if Joshua led a vast army of Israelites on a blitzkrieg attack that quickly defeated all enemies and gave Israel full control of the land (Josh. 10:40-43; 11:16-20, and 21:43-45). Other accounts offer a more realistic appraisal of the many places and peoples that the Israelites were unable to defeat (Josh. 13:13; 15:13-19, 63; 16:10; 17:11-13, 16-18; see also Judges 1).

Israel’s entry into Palestine likely took place over a long period of time that is telescoped in some parts of the biblical record. Among academics and archaeologists who pay close attention to such things, several prominent models have come to dominate the discussion:

*The Immigration Model*—The work of Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth imagines a long and relatively peaceful infiltration of the land by diverse groups related to the Israelites (the Exodus group, people who joined Israel on the way, and indigenous Israelites who had remained in Canaan). They see Joshua’s primary role as being a unifier of the diverse tribes. This model pictures a migration of semi-nomads first into unpopulated areas (the mountains and hill country), later extending to the larger city-states.

*The Conquest Model*—William F. Albright, George E. Wright, and John Bright have defended the basic integrity of the military success under Joshua, with qualifications. They picture a time in the late Bronze Age: the 13th century reveals widespread destruction levels and cultural change (as at Hazor, Megiddo, Beth-shan, Bethel, Gezer, Lachish), even though other sites reportedly conquered don’t match the chronology. The early Iron Age (1200-900 BC) gave rise to many new villages in the country over the tops of former cities.

*The Revolt Model*—George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald are the most notable proponents of a model that regards the “conquest” as a socio-political upheaval from within by Canaanite peasants who sought relief from the oppressive feudal system of the Canaanite city-states. In this view, the arrival of Joshua and the Exodus group sparked a widespread revolt aided by an egalitarian religion in which Yahweh promised deliverance from bondage and a special relationship between God and people.

*The Pastoral Canaanite Model*—More recently, Israel Finkelstein has argued that the people that came to be known as Israel emerged largely from among indigenous people who moved from nomadic to sedentary life as part of a cyclical pattern sparked by social, economic, or agricultural crises. He notes the emergence of many small villages in the hill country during that period.

*The Mixed Multitude Model*—In combining elements of other views, William Dever posits that Israelites came from indigenous peoples of the region, including the Transjordan, who

## Digging Deeper *continued*

were displaced. The new nation would have included outcasts, refugees, land-hungry peasants, urban dropouts, and immigrants such as the Shasu who settled in the hills and came to worship Yahweh.

Choosing between the various views is problematic, because all of them depend on archaeological data or anthropological suppositions that are subject to varying interpretations. However it came about, over a period of time, Israel emerged in a way so that Canaan was “Israelitized,” and Israel was in some ways “Canaanized.” The land never had a purely Israelite culture or population: other peoples and cultures were always present.

**Blessing and cursing**—Joshua’s speech summarizes the covenant theology in this way:

“And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed. But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that the LORD your God has given you. If you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he enjoined on you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you.” (Josh. 23:14-16).

**Stones and trees**—Sacred stones and trees were an accepted part of Israel’s worship in its early years in the land, but as time went on, both came to be so associated with the worship of other gods such as Baal and Asherah that they were considered improper for Israel’s use.

A sacred oak was also associated with Shechem in Gen. 12:6, 35:4 and Deut. 11:30. A reference in Judg. 9:6 speaks of Abimelech having himself crowned king at “the oak of the pillar at Shechem,” clearly an attempt to claim sacred legitimacy.

The inclusion of trees within sanctuaries was later condemned (Deut. 12:2; 2 Kgs. 16:4; Isa. 1:29, 57:5; Hos. 4:13; Jer. 2:27, 3:6; Hab. 2:19; Ezek. 6:13, 20:28), but in the early development of Israelite religion, stones and trees were acceptable as visible aids to worship. The traditions associated with them were so strong that their memory was preserved in stories, even when the practice was no longer accepted.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Do we live under the same theology of blessing and cursing?

The theology inherent in this and other works of the Deuteronomistic writers is problematic for modern Christians. Some readers take delight in a hard and fast theology that promises blessings to the righteous and trouble to the rebellious, believing that everyone should get what they deserve. Others are aware that life is not so simple. Job, Ecclesiastes, and other Old Testament writings attempted to deal with this quandary: the traditional theology of Israel didn't always work out as expected, even for people living under the covenant.

This question persisted into New Testament times, when Jesus pointed out that tragedy is not always the result of a person's sin (cf. Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-9). The black and white theology of the Deuteronomistic history was a special covenant for a special time: it does not necessarily carry over to Christian faith. Followers of Jesus live under a new covenant through the work of Christ (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8, 9:15, 12:24): the old covenant does not apply to those who live under the new covenant (Heb. 8:13).

This does not mean that we do not learn from the old covenant, however. It will always be true that choices have consequences. Those who choose God's way are not promised an easy life, but are assured of grace to endure every trial, and of eternal life with God. Those who choose the way of sin have no present comfort from God, and no promise of hope beyond this earthly life. Because of Christ, the opportunity to repent and experience God's grace is ours at any time, but one thing has not changed: we must make the choice.

We are not faced with the issue of marrying Canaanites or worshiping their gods, as the Israelites were, but we also face the option of which friends we will choose and whether they will lead us astray—though we are also quite capable of straying on our own. What influences in our culture serve the same tempting role of leading persons away from the true God?

The text should lead us to ponder what aspects of the Christian's pilgrimage are similar to Israel's covenant ceremony with God: in both, the choices we make are central.