

# Youth 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)*

## YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Tyler Johnson

This youth 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.

### Gathering

As your group comes together, ask students how they are doing and what their week looks like. Reflect on the previous week's challenge.

### Opening Activity

-Some people say that life is a series of choices. What was the best choice you've made, and what made it so great? Sometimes choices can feel silly and insignificant, but other decisions can feel life altering. To date, what was the biggest decision that you ever made that impacted your life in major ways?

### Listening to the Scripture

Read aloud Joshua 24:1-25.

- Joshua took over for Moses, and made the choice to continue to follow God in what could be stressful circumstances. What can we learn from Joshua about making faithful choices even though we may be scared to make the right decisions?
- Joshua was convinced that life could not be lived in the promised land without choosing a deep and real relationship with God. What is a decision you stand by to this day even though it may not have been popular?
- Joshua gave the people with an ultimatum before entering the promised land, and accomplished this by looking back and looking ahead. What do you take into account before making a big decision?
- Joshua says, "Choose who you will serve, but as for me and my family, we will serve The Lord." How does Joshua respect the agency and autonomy of each person? How does that live out in our lives today?

If you would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

- Read/highlight each model of their entry that Tony highlights and see which model students align with and why.

If the group is up for a challenge, discuss what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*: Do we live in the same theology of blessing and cursing?

Jesus flipped the script. Blessing and cursing tends to be transactional, but what is revealed about God through Jesus is that this was all about relationship and not transaction. Jesus was more

## Listening to the Scripture *continued*

concerned about our hearts and not our actions. Actions can be faked, the heart cannot. Holding ourselves under rigid blessing and cursing from a heart of action instead of relationship can lead to a legalistic view and practice of worshiping God.

## Application

Think about all the decisions you made in a day. Which one was the least significant, and which one had the greatest impact on your day?

## 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 were displaced. The new nation would have included outcasts, refugees, land-hungry

## Digging Deeper *continued*

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.