

JOSHUA 24

THE TRIBES RENEW THE COVENANT AND THE DEATH OF JOSHUA

While the previous chapter records Joshua's address to the elders and captains of Israel, the final chapter of the book of Joshua features both Joshua's concluding speech to Israel as a whole and a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem (24:1). Many of the themes in this speech are a continuation of themes in the previous speech, with a heavy emphasis on covenant faithfulness to Jehovah.

The speech is divided into parts. First, Joshua spoke with the people (verses 2–15), who responded (verses 16–18). Joshua then gave a second, concluding speech that was more of a dialogue with the assembly (verses 19–28). The covenant renewal occurred during this second speech, and the people of Israel affirmed their allegiance to Jehovah (verses 20–24). The covenant aspect of the episode was made explicit by the narrator in verse 25: "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem." Ever conscientious to ensure the continued remembrance of the covenant, Joshua had his speech recorded on a stone monument near the tabernacle (verse 26), evoking the imagery of Moses recording God's law on stone tablets. The record of the speech served as a witness against Israel should its people renege on the terms of the covenant (see verse 27).

Joshua's speeches also served as a sort of summary of Israel's history. Mentioned in the speech specifically were the patriarchs (verses 2–4), Moses and the Exodus (verses 5–7), episodes during the wilderness wanderings (verses 8–10), and the conquest of Canaan (verses 11–13). The speech therefore served as a sweeping overview of God's dealings that led Israel to its current situation. This rhetorically served to emphasize God's faithfulness in upholding His covenant with Israel.

The final section of this chapter, and the concluding postscript to the book of Joshua as a whole, narrates the deaths of Joshua and Eleazar, which mark the passing of a generation (verses 29–33). As did his righteous predecessor Joseph,¹ Joshua lived to be 110 years old, the ideal age in biblical reckoning.² The age of the priest Eleazar at the time of his death is not given. Somewhat surprisingly, the book ends not with Joshua’s death but with Eleazar’s, perhaps indicating the priestly interests of the compiler of the text.

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¹ Joshua’s remains, incidentally, were reinterred at Shechem, per Joshua 24:32.

² Joshua 24:29; compare Genesis 50:26. Note also how Moses lived to be 120 years old (Deuteronomy 34:7), perhaps indicating his (slightly) elevated status over Joshua in the eyes of the biblical historian.