

Joshua 24:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Analysis

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve... This climactic verse stands as Joshua's final challenge to Israel, demanding decisive commitment to the covenant God who brought them into the Promised Land. The Hebrew phrase *bachar lakhem* (בָּחָר לְכֶם, "choose for yourselves") emphasizes personal responsibility and active decision-making. Joshua does not present neutrality as an option—humanity must serve someone or something. The question is not whether to serve, but whom.

Joshua frames the choice starkly: the gods of Mesopotamia that Abraham's ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates (*eber hanahar*, עַבֵּר הַנָּהָר), the gods of the Amorites currently surrounding them, or Yahweh, the covenant God who revealed Himself through redemptive acts. The word "evil" (*ra*, רָע) is deliberately provocative—Joshua challenges them to admit if serving God seems burdensome or undesirable compared to idolatry's false promises.

Joshua's personal declaration—"but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"—exemplifies covenant leadership. The phrase *anoki ubeiti* (אָנֹכִי וּבְיַחַד, "I and my household") demonstrates that spiritual leadership begins at home. Joshua does not wait for popular consensus but establishes his family's commitment

regardless of others' choices. This verse has become the definitive Old Testament statement on personal and family devotion to God, echoed in countless households throughout history as a declaration of covenant faithfulness.

Historical Context

This covenant renewal ceremony occurred at Shechem, a location rich with patriarchal history—where Abraham first received God's promise (Genesis 12:6-7) and Jacob buried foreign gods (Genesis 35:2-4). By 1400 BC, Israel had completed the conquest and settlement of Canaan. Joshua, now elderly (he would soon die at age 110), gathered all Israel for this final charge.

The historical context reveals the constant threat of syncretism. The Canaanite fertility religion surrounding Israel promised agricultural prosperity through Baal worship, child sacrifice to Molech, and ritual prostitution. Archaeological discoveries at sites like Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer reveal the pervasive nature of these practices. The "gods your fathers served beyond the River" refers to the Mesopotamian pantheon that Abraham's family worshiped in Ur before God's call (Joshua 24:2).

Joshua's challenge comes after rehearsing Israel's entire redemptive history (Joshua 24:2-13), demonstrating God's faithfulness through Abraham's call, Egyptian deliverance, wilderness provision, and Canaanite conquest. The phrase "choose this day" creates urgency—decisions cannot be postponed. Ancient Near Eastern covenant renewal ceremonies typically included historical recitation, stipulations, and oath-taking, which Joshua follows here. This assembly at Shechem parallels Moses' covenant ceremony in Deuteronomy 27-30, establishing continuity between the great leaders and emphasizing that each generation must personally embrace covenant commitment.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. In what practical areas of your life are you tempted to 'serve' other priorities, allegiances, or desires instead of the LORD—career success, family approval, financial security, personal comfort—and what would change if you applied Joshua's declaration to those specific areas today?
2. How does Joshua's example of leading his household in serving the LORD challenge your approach to spiritual leadership in your family, and what specific steps could you take to establish or strengthen your family's commitment to God?
3. Joshua presents an either/or choice with no middle ground—we must serve someone. What 'functional gods' (things you trust in, pursue devotedly, or derive your identity from) compete with serving the LORD in your daily decisions and affections?
4. The Israelites faced pressure to adopt the religious practices of surrounding nations. What are the contemporary equivalents—cultural values, worldviews, or practices that pressure Christians to compromise covenant faithfulness—and how can we resist syncretism in our context?
5. Joshua's call to 'choose this day' creates urgency rather than allowing indefinite procrastination. What decision regarding whole-hearted service to God have you been postponing, and what prevents you from making that commitment today?

Interlinear Text

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 18:21 (References God): And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

Deuteronomy 29:18 (References God): Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;

Ezekiel 20:39 (References God): As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols.

Acts 11:23 (References God): Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Judges 6:10 (References God): And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Exodus 23:24 (References God): Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.

Genesis 18:19 (References Lord): For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

Psalms 101:2 (Parallel theme): I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

Psalms 119:106 (Parallel theme): I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

Deuteronomy 13:7 (References God): Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;