

Joshua 24:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.

Analysis

And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac.

Joshua's covenant renewal begins with historical recitation, grounding present obligations in past grace. The phrase "Thus saith the LORD" (koh amar Yahweh, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה) introduces prophetic oracle—Joshua speaks not his own words but God's. This establishes authority: covenant renewal must be based on divine revelation, not human tradition or preference. The historical review starts with Israel's ancestors dwelling "on the other side of the flood" (Hebrew nahar, נָחַר, the Euphrates River) in Mesopotamia, where "they served other gods."

This stunning admission—that Abraham's family were idolaters—grounds covenant relationship entirely in divine grace, not human merit. Israel didn't descend from naturally God-seeking ancestors; they came from pagans whom God graciously called. The Hebrew verb "served" (avad, עָבַד) is the same used for proper worship of Yahweh, emphasizing that Abraham's family gave to false gods the devotion belonging only to the true God. This reveals that all humanity stands on equal

footing—every person, every family, every nation begins in spiritual darkness until God's gracious revelation and calling intervene.

The phrase "I took your father Abraham" (eqach et-avikhem et-Avraham, אָקַח אֶת־אַבְרָהָם) emphasizes divine initiative—God took, called, led, multiplied, gave. Five divine actions establish the patriarchal narrative: God took Abraham from paganism, led him through Canaan, multiplied his descendants, gave Isaac, and (verse 4) gave Esau Mount Seir while leading Jacob to Egypt. Every step of redemptive history reflects divine sovereignty and grace. Reformed theology's doctrine of election finds clear expression here: God chooses, calls, and accomplishes His purposes through undeserving people for His own glory.

Historical Context

Archaeological evidence confirms ancient Mesopotamian religion. Excavations at Ur (Abraham's birthplace) and Haran reveal temples to the moon god Sin and other deities. The discovery of thousands of cuneiform tablets from these cities documents elaborate polytheistic worship systems. Joshua's reference to Abraham's family serving other gods aligns with this cultural context. Even Terah's name possibly derives from a moon deity, suggesting deep cultural immersion in paganism.

The phrase "other side of the flood" (הַנְּהָר, hanahar, "the River") specifically refers to the Euphrates, distinguishing Mesopotamia ("beyond the River") from Canaan ("this side of the River"). This geographical-theological boundary marked the division between paganism and covenant faith, between the land Abraham left and the land he entered by faith (Genesis 12:1-4; Hebrews 11:8-10). The crossing of the Euphrates represented more than geographical relocation—it symbolized spiritual transformation from idolatry to monotheism.

The recitation of redemptive history follows Deuteronomy's pattern (Deuteronomy 6:20-25; 26:5-10) where parents answer children's questions by recounting God's mighty acts. This catechetical approach grounds faith in historical events, not abstract philosophy. Christianity is fundamentally historical religion—based on what God did in space and time, particularly in Christ's incarnation, death, and

resurrection. Joshua models how covenant renewal requires remembering and rehearsing these historical foundations, lest subsequent generations lose their moorings.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the fact that Abraham's family served other gods demonstrate that salvation originates entirely from God's grace rather than human seeking?
2. What does Joshua's historical recitation teach about the importance of knowing redemptive history for maintaining covenant faithfulness?
3. How can we regularly rehearse God's mighty acts in our own lives and church history to strengthen faith in our generation?

Interlinear Text

אָמַר	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֵל	כָּל	הָעָם	כֹּה	אָמַר	יְהוָה
Thus saith	And Joshua	H413	H3605	unto all the people	H3541	Thus saith	the LORD
H559	H3091			H5971		H559	H3068
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	יְשָׁב וְ	בְּעַרְבֵי	הַנָּהָר	וְיָשָׁב וְ	אָבִי		
God	of Israel	on the other side	of the flood	dwelt	Your fathers		
H430	H3478	H5676	H5104	H3427	H1		
מִעוֹלָם	תֵּרַח	אָבִי	אֲבֹתָם	אָבִי	נַח וְ		
in old time	even Terah	Your fathers	of Abraham	Your fathers	of Nachor		
H5769	H8646	H1	H85	H1	H5152		
וַעֲבָדוּ	אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֲחֵרִים:					
and they served	God	other					
H5647	H430	H312					

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 31:30 (References God): And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?

Joshua 24:15 (References God): 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.

Isaiah 51:2 (References Abraham): Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

Genesis 31:32 (References God): With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.

Genesis 35:4 (References God): And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.

Genesis 31:19 (Parallel theme): And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's.

Genesis 31:53 (References God): The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac.

Deuteronomy 26:5 (References God): And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous:

Ezekiel 16:3 (References God): And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.