

# OpenTheo

## June 16th: Joshua 23 & Galatians 1

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Joshua challenges the Israelites. Paul's gospel and apostleship.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Joshua 23. A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, I am now old and well advanced in years, and you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you. Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the great sea in the west.

The Lord your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight, and you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you. Therefore be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, that you may not mix with these nations

remaining among you. Or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them.

But you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day. For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day.

One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he has promised you. Be very careful therefore to love the Lord your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you, and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you.

But they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you. 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 word 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 evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God which he commanded 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 off the good land that he has given to you. Joshua chapter 23 contains the first of two farewell addresses from Joshua.

Much as Deuteronomy ended with farewell discourses from Moses, and Genesis with farewell discourses from Jacob, so Joshua ends with such discourses from Joshua. The speech recalls earlier speeches, while looking forward to the nation's future. It is part of a covenant renewal that ends Joshua's ministry, much as the covenant renewal on the plains of Moab at the end of the book of Deuteronomy comes at the end of Moses' life.

Joshua is about to die, and Israel is about to enter into a new stage of their history. Much as in Moses' farewell discourse in Deuteronomy, Joshua foresees apostasy in the nation's future, and this speech is very redolent of Deuteronomy throughout. Joshua summons all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and its officers.

This reference to the various officials brings to mind the fact that Israel will soon undergo a change in its political formation. If the movement from Moses to Joshua was a graduation to a maturer form of politics, this is a further graduation. Government is now going to be exercised far more from the people themselves, and a plurality of officials, rather than by a single appointed minister of the Lord, a charismatic figure like Moses or Joshua, someone who stands over against the people.

The sort of government that follows this transition will be much more apparent as we enter into the book of Judges. This speech recalls the speech that introduced the apportioning of the land in Joshua 13, verses 1-7, especially its introduction. Now Joshua was old and advanced in years, and the Lord said to him, You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to possess.

It also recalls Joshua chapter 1 and the charge given to Joshua and the people before they entered into the land. Finally, it recalls the statements of chapter 21, verses 43-45. Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it, and they settled there.

And the Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed.

All came to pass. Joshua's speech ties together the earlier speech of the Lord to Joshua in chapter 1, the summary statement of the narrator in chapter 21, and it looks forward to the future, with its challenges and uncertainties. Joshua is about to die and the people are settled in the land, yet the challenge of completely taking over the land remains.

As John Barrett has noted, the expression, the Lord your God, is repeated 12 times within this chapter. They are called to be strong, to do the law of Moses. The challenge of faithfulness will always be the primary challenge for them.

It is precisely as they pursue faithfulness that they will be equipped for the other challenges that they face. There are still Canaanite peoples in the land. The land has been conquered, but there are still Canaanites present.

They may not be the same military force to threaten Israel, but they do threaten Israel in its faithfulness. It would be very easy for these peoples to lead them astray. Israel is not instructed to exterminate these people.

It is presumed that they will remain in the land. The challenge rather is to ensure that if any assimilation occurs, it will be the Canaanites assimilating into Israel, rather than vice versa. Daniel Haug underlines the nature of Israel's responsibility at this point.

It is primarily one of faithfulness to the law of Moses and cleaving to the Lord. The Lord will deal with the remaining threats to them within the land. One of the greatest dangers is that of merging with Canaanite peoples.

This was a point that Moses belaboured back in Deuteronomy chapter 7. The temptation for Israel would always be to make strategic alliances, to assimilate with the peoples of the land, adopting their customs and their ways. Deuteronomy chapter 11 verses 22 to 23 promised, For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you

to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. Joshua presents a similar promise again in verse 5. As there, the crucial thing will be faithfulness to the Lord.

If they fail at that point, everything else will fall apart. Obeying the Lord will take strength and courage. It would be very easy for Israel to lose its nerve.

Cleaving to the Lord requires separation from the other peoples and nations that surround them, and which still dwell in the land. But such separation is a risky matter. To be a people dwelling alone, as Balaam described Israel, requires a great deal of courage, when prudent politics would seem to require religious syncretism, intermarriage, and treaties as the way to secure peace and security.

Loving the Lord and holding fast to him is going to be a matter of national survival for Israel. It is from this love of, and cleaving to the Lord, that everything else flows. It is this that will set them apart.

Not something internal to the nation itself, but its covenant with the Lord. This is what they must hold on to over everything else. If they lose their nerve and start to intermingle with the Canaanites, the Canaanites will become a snare to them.

Their warning here is reminiscent of Numbers chapter 33 verse 55. The speech ends by emphasising the certainty of the word of the Lord. All of the good things that the Lord had promised had come to pass.

However, the curse was no less certain than the blessing, and if and when the Israelites rejected the covenant, they would perish from the land, just as certainly as they had been blessed according to the word of the Lord for their faithfulness. A question to consider. Can you think of further ways in which keeping the commandment of the Lord would have required courage and strength on Israel's part? I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him, who called you in the grace of Christ, and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel, for I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of

Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it, and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

In what I am writing to you before God I do not lie. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ, they were only hearing it said, he who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy, and they glorify God because of me. Paul introduces his epistle to the Galatians in a manner that immediately alerts the reader to one of its most prominent themes.

He declares himself to be an apostle, but is concerned to distinguish the source of that apostleship. Paul's apostleship is grounded not in some human commission, nor does it arise from some human authority, but it comes from Christ and God the Father who raised Christ from the dead. Paul at the very outset is defending his apostleship from misunderstanding, something that would be crucial for the argument of his letter.

Paul writes with the brothers with him, presumably fellow missionaries who are alongside him. He addresses the churches of Galatia. Galatians is unusual in being addressed to the churches of a region, not just a specific city.

The question of what region is a live one. There are conflicting theories over where the Galatians were situated. The Roman province of Galatia was large.

It covered a significant region of Central Asia Minor, what we would now call Turkey. North and South Galatian hypotheses have both been advanced. So the ethnic Galatian people live largely in the north of the province, while the Roman province included areas to the south, including cities like Iconium, Lystra and Derby, which Paul and Barnabas visited on Paul's first missionary journey in Acts 14 1-23.

The hypotheses will weigh in, but without deciding, questions of dating the letter, as Paul visited the region of Galatia in Acts 16 6 and 18 23 and may have planted the churches then. However, if the southern Galatian churches are in mind, then it might give weight to those theses that would argue for a much earlier date for the book, perhaps even before the Jerusalem Council. Having declared his identity and his credentials and

identified his addressees, Paul blesses the Galatians as an emissary of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace is a characteristic greeting of Pauline epistles, and here it comes from the source of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As in his opening declaration of his apostolic vocation, with its reference to the resurrection of Christ, there is again a core theological claim in Paul's reference to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ here. Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of the Father.

As in the statement concerning the resurrection, the unity of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in the work of redemption is focused upon. The work of Jesus is the work of God. God raised him from the dead, and Jesus gave himself for our sins according to the will of God.

And the work of God is the work of Jesus, who was raised from the dead and gave himself for our sins. This decisive, gracious act of God occurs in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Also, as the action of the Father, this act will be, as we will later see, one that leads to adoption as sons.

This act was for the purpose of delivering the Galatians, alongside whom Paul joins himself and his fellow missionaries in the pronoun us, from the present evil age. If we focus merely upon the statement that Christ gave himself for our sins, we might think of this merely in terms of an individual salvation system. However, Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.

There is something more apocalyptic going on here. Christ giving himself for our sins delivers us from a doomed world order and age. This all occurs in accordance with the will of the Father, who achieves his purpose in and through history.

Paul uncharacteristically ends his opening salutation on a doxological note, to whom be the glory forever and ever, Amen. Having begun in this sort of manner, Paul immediately launches into rebuking the Galatians for their failure to hold firm to the Gospel. Unlike in other epistles, where Paul speaks of his pleasure in his knowledge of his recipients' growth in their faith and their witness, and his confidence in their continued development, there is no such encouragement here.

The Galatian churches are turning away from the one true Gospel, to a message that isn't a Gospel at all. There is only one message of good news, and they are compromising it. The language of Gospel seems to be a way of summing up the message of Christ.

In the Gospels, the word Gospel tends to be used in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 40 verses 9 to 11. And Isaiah chapter 52 verses 7 to 10.

The Gospel here is a message about an event in history, about the Lord returning to Zion to deliver it, and to be present in the midst of his people for blessing once more. It's a statement of the establishment of the reign of God. Gospel, then, is not a timeless message of salvation.

It's a message of the work of God in the fullness of time in Jesus Christ. The Gospel can be summed up in statements about the reign of God, which is why the Gospel can be termed the Gospel of the Kingdom. Its more particular realisation in the ministry of Christ can be expressed in the statement, Jesus is Lord.

That's the shape that the Kingdom of God, the reign of God, takes. However, the Gospel can also be fleshed out considerably. In the Gospels, not only does the term Gospel refer to the message of God's coming reign, or to the particular form that this takes in Christ's Lordship, but it can also refer to the larger story of the coming of the Kingdom in the ministry of Christ.

This can be witnessed in Matthew 26, verse 13, where Jesus says of the woman who anoints him with the costly ointment, Truly I say to you, wherever this Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. There, Gospel seems to refer to the broader story that is told of Christ and his work in bringing the Kingdom of God. I don't see any reason to suppose that Paul uses the terminology of Gospel in a fundamentally different manner.

Although there are clearly different emphases. He is not talking about general and timeless truths about God, but about a historical event of epochal importance, in terms of which all social reality must be renegotiated. However, whereas Matthew 26 uses the term Gospel to refer to the expanded narrative of the coming of the reign of Christ, Paul can use the term Gospel to refer to the reality of the reign of God in Christ, as it is expounded in its character and form and implications.

This is founded on the narrative, of course, but the accent lies at a somewhat different point. His concern is to show that the message of the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, we should always remember that Christ means Messiah, necessarily entails realities denied by the false teachers whose influence he is seeking to counteract. They have exchanged the glorious message of the reign established by Christ for a petty message of Jewish exclusivism.

Paul, as a master of rhetorical argument, steps back for a moment from the argument to make the point that his intent is not to gain human approval, but God's. His concern is God's approval over man pleasing. This not only has the effect of giving greater weight to his words, it also transitions to his next point.

His concern for the approval of God over all men is appropriate to the character of the gospel that he is presenting, which isn't a human gospel. He didn't receive it from

another man, nor was he taught it in some institution of learning. Rather, his message of the reign of Christ came from Christ himself in an act of revelation, presumably a reference to his conversion on the road to Damascus.

Paul gets into his biography at this point. He had been set apart by God from birth for the purpose of preaching to the Gentiles. Here the reader should recall Jeremiah chapter 1 verses 4 to 5. Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.

I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Paul also is a prophet to the nations, a messenger to the Gentiles. Further echoes could be found in Isaiah chapter 49 verses 1 to 6. Paul's own life exemplifies the radical grace of Christ.

He was a violent persecutor of the church. He was a man of zeal, a man who might remind us of the tradition of zeal represented by characters such as the Levites, Phinehas or Elijah. However, God had already set him apart for a determined purpose for which he called him in due time by his grace.

Paul is called by God's grace much as the Gentile Christians were in verse 6. Paul himself, prior to his call, would seem to have been utterly disqualified by his persecution of the church. Yet the grace of Christ is manifested in his choice of Paul. All of the things that formerly represented Paul's standing among his people have been eclipsed by a radical and remarkable act of grace upon which the entire rest of his life must be founded.

We might think of characters like Peter and Paul mostly as witnesses to the story rather than prominent actors in the story. However, I believe we are justified in thinking of Paul's call and mission as something that has redemptive historical significance in itself. Paul is set apart by God by birth for a decisive mission at the turn of the ages.

Like John the Baptist had a unique mission in preparing the way for Christ, Peter and Paul especially have unique missions in laying the foundations of the age of the church. They are uniquely set apart for these purposes. Indeed, Paul's mission is not just to declare a message of good news to the Gentiles but to realise the meaning of the message he is bringing in calling Gentiles into submission to the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here Paul is concerned to make clear that the gospel he preaches came directly from God, not from a human source. And to make this clear he gives a brief sketch of his life after God's revelation of his son to him on the road to Damascus. He makes the point that the message of the gospel did not come from Jerusalem and its authorities.

Rather it was a direct prophetic revelation from God in Christ himself. After his conversion Paul went away into Arabia for a time. This is a mysterious detail of his biography.



And it's not entirely clear where the Arabia in question is. As Paul declares that Mount Sinai is in Arabia in chapter 4 verse 25, N.T. Wright has suggested that Paul might be retreading the path of Elijah from 1 Kings chapter 9 where Elijah went to Mount Sinai to meet with God before being sent back to Damascus. Later, after three years, Paul has a brief trip to Jerusalem during which time he meets with Peter whom he calls Cephas as he does most times when he refers to the apostle Peter.

This, it seems to me, refers to Acts chapter 9 verses 26 to 28. It seems that Paul visited Peter at this time. Presumably that's the reference to Barnabas bringing him to meet the apostles.

He didn't meet any of the other apostles though except for James the brother of Jesus. Presuming we are using the word apostle in a more expansive sense. He then went to the region of Syria and Cilicia, described in the verses that immediately follow in Acts chapter 9 verses 29 to 30.

Paul came from Tarsus and was based in the church at Antioch for a number of years early on. At this point the churches in Judea still only knew him by reputation but they were heartened by an approving of the reports that they heard, glorifying God on his account. Paul was described as preaching the faith which suggests that the term faith can carry a more objective sense as the message to which faith properly responds.

A question to consider. What are some of the most important implications of the fact that Paul's gospel is not from man but directly from God? Why does Paul so stress this point?