

# SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**JOSH. 24:2** 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.

**3** 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.

**4** And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau: and I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt.

**5** I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out.

**6** And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red sea.

**7** And when they cried unto the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them, and covered them; and your eyes have seen what I have done in Egypt: and ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season.

**8** And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side Jordan; and they fought with you: and I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land; and I destroyed them from before you.

**9** Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you:

**10** But I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still: so I delivered you out of his hand.

**11** And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand.

**12** And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, *even* the two kings of the Amorites; *but* not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.

**13** And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

## NOTES

# God's Mercy in History

Lesson Text: Joshua 24:2-13

Related Scriptures: Genesis 11:27—12:9; Exodus 14:1-31;  
Numbers 21:21-35; 22:36—23:12; Deuteronomy 9:1-5

TIME: about 1390 B.C.

PLACE: Shechem

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—“And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat” (Joshua 24:13).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **GOD'S GRACE FROM UR TO EGYPT— Joshua 24:2-4**

How did the Lord tell the story of His dealings with Israel? Rather than beginning with Abraham, the Lord began the story with Terah, Abraham's father. In Genesis, Moses, too, began the Abraham story with Terah (11:27). Genesis unfolds as a series of literary units that begin with the Hebrew word *toledot*, meaning generations, or genealogy. Moses told the story of Terah's family.

Why do both Genesis and Joshua's narration of Abraham's life begin with Terah? There are at least two reasons.

First, Terah emphasized that Abraham had no *toledot* (family record) of his own. Second, Terah's obscurity to Bible readers emphasizes the obscure beginnings of the great man Abraham. God did not choose a renowned man but turned him into a renowned man by choosing him.

Joshua 24:2 says Terah and his sons Abraham and Nachor lived beyond the Euphrates River. They worshipped false gods.

Why does Joshua 24 mention that Terah worshipped idols? Verse 15 reveals the reason. This is not mere

storytelling hour; this is a retelling of Israel's history aimed at discouraging idolatry and encouraging faithfulness to the Lord.

Abraham was saved from a life of idolatry around 2100 B.C., and Joshua wanted to warn Israel not to undo seven hundred years of God's gracious intervention with Abraham and his descendants. Abraham would have carried on worshipping idols were it not for God's intervention. God's intervention is described with four action verbs: “took,” “led,” “multiplied,” and “gave.”

God *took* Abraham from the land of idolatry. Genesis 11:27-32 does not say exactly why Terah decided to pack up his clan and move from Ur. Terah intended to move his family to Canaan but stopped in a place named Haran and settled there (vs. 31), where he would eventually die.

Joshua 24 describes all this complex movement in surprisingly simple terms: God took Abraham from his home. God emphasizes that *He* was relocating Abraham for a larger purpose.

Then God *led* Abraham and *multiplied* his descendants. Infertility was painful for Abraham and Sarah. What

they could not do for themselves, however, God graciously did for them. The word “multiplied” recalls the famous mandate in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply. Procreation was blessed in Genesis 1:28 but affected by sin after Adam and Eve’s disobedience (3:16).

God would fittingly take, lead, and multiply a couple struggling with infertility so that the solution to sin would clearly be the result of God’s work and not natural human procreation. The word pair “multiply descendants” often occurs in the Old Testament when God wanted to emphasize how He was fulfilling promises to Abraham to bless all nations (Gen. 26:24; 48:4; Jer. 33:22).

Last, God *gave* Isaac to Abraham. This child represented God’s plan to bless and save sinners from all families of the earth (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8).

Perhaps to emphasize God’s generosity, Joshua 24:3-4 strings together three instances of divine generosity. First, God gave Isaac to Abraham. Second, God also gave Jacob and Esau to Isaac, for Isaac and Rebekah also grieved because of their infertility. Then one would expect the text to say that God gave sons to Jacob. That is not what the text says, however. Instead, it says God gave land to Esau’s descendants. Yes, verse 4 says Jacob had sons. But the interruption of the series of verbs of giving is startling.

While Esau’s descendants got to put down roots in the hill country of Seir, Jacob’s family embarked on what would be a four-hundred-year sojourn in Egypt.

God was kind to both Esau and Jacob, but Esau was not the recipient of the descendant promise from Genesis 12:1-3. Sometimes God leads His people on a more difficult, circuitous path than others experience. Jacob’s clan of seventy did not settle in the Promised Land permanently but became sojourners in Egypt.

## GOD’S GRACE FROM EGYPT TO MOAB—Joshua 24:5-10

God’s action continues in this section. First, Israel emerged from bondage in Egypt, and God continued to care for them during their wilderness wandering. The Lord narrated these two eras differently from the patriarchal era by using the pronoun “you.” Some of those listening to Joshua would have witnessed the exodus and wilderness events, albeit as young people below twenty years old at the time of the exodus (cf. Num. 14:29). The people who would have been old enough to remember the plagues were elderly at the time of Joshua’s farewell address.

God had sent Moses and Aaron as Israel’s leaders. Moses led as a prophet, and Aaron led as a priest. God struck the Egyptians through the ten plagues and brought His people out of Egypt. This is central to the story, reflected later in the Bible in the word “exodus,” which means “departure” or “way out” (cf. Heb. 11:22). Joshua 24:5-6 reminds God’s people that He is the one who made a way out.

Next, Joshua 24:5-10 describes God’s action in the Red Sea deliverance. The danger of being cornered by the Egyptian army caused Israel to cry out to the Lord. So God placed a cloud in the army’s way so that they could not harm defenseless Israel.

God then brought the sea down on the Egyptians. The Lord described it as what He *did* to Egypt. This verb is often associated with one’s handiwork. Joshua’s hearers were learning to view redemptive history as God’s own handiwork.

God led the people in the wilderness. He brought wandering Israel to the Amorite territory, east of the Jordan River (cf. Num. 21:21-35). Those victories were confidence-boosting victories. Those wins demonstrated God’s ability to strengthen them in battle.

God gave the Amorites—two groups led by King Sihon and King Og—to the Israelites. God destroyed the Amorite enemies of Israel.

Even more sinister than the Amorite kings was the Moabite king Balak, who hired Balaam to curse Israel. God would not listen to Balaam's curses. More than that, Numbers 23 through 24 describe how the Lord comically overrode Balaam's oracles to bless Israel. God caused Balaam to reiterate the promises made to Abraham (23:9-10). Balaam even prophesied the victory of King Jesus (24:17). Because the curses failed, Balaam advised King Balak to tempt Israel to incite God's discipline through idolatry and adultery (25:1-9; 31:16).

God, however, delivered Israel from both the curses and the plot from Balaam. Many Israelites died in the wilderness due to God's just discipline, but as a people, they survived because of God's faithful action.

### **GOD'S GRACE FROM MOAB TO THE PROMISED LAND—Joshua 24:11-13**

Next, the Lord narrated events recorded in the book of Joshua. He reminded Israel of their victory at Jericho. Then the Lord listed seven people groups defeated by the Israelite army. Seven represents complete divine work. Israel defeated more than those peoples in this list, for in Joshua 24:11-13 and in Deuteronomy 7:1-2, these seven groups represented total, divinely accomplished victory. God gave the enemy nations over to Israel. They had to trust and fight, but God gave the victory.

To emphasize the divine origin of these victories, God sent something ominous ahead of Israel to defeat their enemies: hornets. That means that God sent vicious insects ahead of Israel's army to disorient and terrify the inhabitants of Canaan. "Hornets" convey the terrifying reality inflicted on the Canaanites when they heard about Is-

rael's military success. Joshua 2:11 describes the deep-seated fear in Jericho as Israel's army approached. Ultimately, God's actions both encouraged the Israelites and led to their enemies' defeat.

Summarizing the lesser-known land distribution passages in Joshua 13 through 21, Joshua declared that God gave Israel the land. To emphasize grace, Joshua described three unearned aspects of Israel's new home: they did not work for it, they did not build its cities, and they did not plant its ready-made vineyards and olive orchards. All of Joshua 24:2-13 emphasizes God's work. Israel just got to enjoy what God had given them.

—Matthew Swale

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Who did the account in Joshua 24 begin with, and why?
2. Why did Joshua mention that Abraham worshipped idols?
3. What four action verbs describe God's intervention toward Abraham?
4. What three instances of divine generosity does Joshua 24:3-4 list?
5. What does the comparison between Jacob and Esau reveal?
6. What would some of Joshua's hearers have witnessed?
7. What did Balaam do after blessing Israel?
8. Why might Joshua have listed seven of the groups the Israelites defeated in the land?
9. What did God send before the Israelites?
10. How did God emphasize the grace shown in giving Israel their new home?

—Matthew Swale

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God calls people out of any background. We should not give up on people as lost causes (Josh. 24:2).
2. The Lord can work even in the most dysfunctional families. No one is beyond His help (vss. 3-4).
3. The Lord can deliver from seemingly impossible situations (vss. 5-7).
4. We can trust the Lord to deal with His enemies (vss. 7-12).
5. We can trust the Lord to keep His promises (vs. 8).
6. We can trust the Lord to protect us (vss. 9-12).
7. We can trust the Lord to provide for us (vs. 13).

—Tom Greene

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat” (Joshua 24:13).**

As Joshua addressed the people of Israel in his final days, he recounted the astonishing mercy and grace that God had shown them. The golden text encapsulates the undeserved blessings that God had poured on His people.

Israel's history was marked by repeated failure and faithlessness. From the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai to the incessant grumbling in the wilderness, they had proven themselves to be a stubborn and ungrateful people. They repeatedly turned their backs on the God who had delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

Yet, in spite of their disobedience, God remained steadfast in His love and commitment to Israel. He continued to guide them, provide for them, and protect them. And now, as they stood on the brink of entering the Promised Land, God's grace was on full display.

The golden text highlights the extent of God's provision for Israel. The land they were about to inherit was a land “for which [they] did not labour.” The cities they would occupy were cities “which [they] built not.” The vineyards and olive groves from which they would eat were ones “which [they] planted not.” Everything they were about to enjoy was a gift from the hand of God, unearned and undeserved; this was the gift of Eden restored, for the curse of labor (Gen. 3:17-19) was meant to be reversed. Such grace was a testament to God's faithfulness to His promises as well as to His unwavering love for His chosen people!

—Gene Kissinger

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why would Joshua spend so much time recapping the history of Israel?
2. How often do you reflect on what God has done for His people?
3. What encouragement can we find in Abraham's family background?
4. How should we feel about the Lord destroying nations in the Old Testament?
5. Why did Joshua name so many specific enemies rather than refer to them generally?
6. Do you think the hornet in Joshua 24:12 is literal or figurative (cf. Ex. 23:28; Deut. 7:20)? What difference (if any) does it make?
7. How has the Lord both delivered and provided for you?
8. How should God's goodness motivate us (cf. Josh. 24:14-15)?

—Tom Greene