

SEPTEMBER 25, 1994

MAKING CHOICES

We define the extent of our freedom in terms of the breadth of our choices. As choices become narrower, we perceive greater limitations of our freedom. Yet all our choices have limitations. The most obvious are related to legal restrictions from a governmental agency. We do have laws. Penalties are assessed for those who choose to go beyond prescribed limits in expressing their freedom. Some limitations may be economic. I may have the freedom to choose a Rolls-Royce car but would quickly run into limits of money to buy it. Other limitations relate to physical capability. If you are 80 years old, then you might find that your freedom to engage in sky diving has very practical limitations. Often limitations are based on social or traditional issues. In such areas, some people limit their freedom while others do not. In a sense, most of our limits are self-imposed. The reason we impose limits on ourselves is that *every action results in a consequence*. Consciously or subconsciously, we do a quick evaluation of the probable consequence of a pending action to decide if the likely outcome will be favorable or unfavorable for us. Our ability to do such evaluations and act accordingly is characterized on a wisdom-foolishness scale. A wise person is known by the wise choices he makes and a foolish person is known by the foolish choices he makes.

As it works out, choosing a particular path in life will open up other choices while simultaneously imposing limitations in other areas. Examples of this truth are living in a foreign country, marriage, accepting employment, joining the army, and enrolling in a university. Any one of these situations open up new choices and limit other choices. The most important choice that we can face is our relationship to God. The choice we make concerning God impacts every other area of life and the options we have there. Our relationship with God opens many new possibilities and closes off many other areas. God has promised that if we will choose His way, then the outcome will be favorable for us (we will be blessed). The nation of Israel was challenged often to make the right choices and to choose for God. Just as they needed many reminders that their choices mattered, so we also need to remember the importance of choosing for God.

JOSHUA 24:1-2, 11-13 For about 25 years, the Israelites had been living in the land promised to Abraham. Joshua was 110 years old and was nearing the end of his life. He took this occasion to emphasize the importance of making the right choices to the nation of Israel. Each tribe sent a delegation of elders, leaders, officials and judges to a meeting with Joshua. We recognize this as a representative form of government. The people came and presented themselves before God (and not Joshua). They recognized that God was really their leader. They were a theocracy with a representative form of government. God set the extent and limitations of their freedom (the rules and laws) and He worked through the people's representatives. We can contrast this with our nation in that we are democracy with a representative form of government. We see ourselves as our own leader. We set the extent and limitations and then work through our representatives. A theocracy has stability of values but a democracy can drift as the values of the people do. One has a fixed point of reference, the other doesn't. For many years, people in our nation were convinced of the correctness of the Bible and that belief provided a stability from which our democracy could operate effectively. Now we have cast off restraint and no longer value the Bible and the principles it teaches and we are drifting in our sense of values.

Joshua spoke for God and reminded the people of all God had done for them in bringing them into the new land. He started with God's call of Abraham and His dealings with Isaac and Jacob. He told them about experiences of Moses and Aaron and how God had rescued their fathers from slavery in Egypt. They, themselves, had experienced what God had done in the defeat of the various tribes living in the area. Many miracles happened such as the walls of Jericho falling down. God had even sent hornets to attach their enemies to drive them out. They did not even have to use their sword in some cases. For the past 25 years they had enjoyed the bounty of olive trees and vineyards that were already there. They lived in houses they didn't build. Truly God had already blessed them.

Joshua was attempting to establish a basis by which the Israelites could renew their commitment to God and His ways. That basis had its foundation in what God had already done. Our problem today is that we do not see the work God is doing in our lives. We tend to attribute things

to *luck* or *coincidence*. Our leaders are either unaware of or afraid to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. Many churches ignore the continuing activity of God in our world and see things happening as a result of "nature" or some other impersonal reason. Because of this lack of consciousness regarding God, we do not typically factor in His way in the choices we make. Joshua did not want that to happen to Israel.

JOSHUA 24:14-15 Joshua's words contain a message that we still need to heed. Proper reverence for God, devotion to Him in obedience, and faithfulness are still important in our relationship to God. Each of us tends to hold onto what has worked for us in the past. We put our trust in many things that are physical and material. Reliance on things was expressed in the life of the Israelites by hanging on to idols from other cultures and other times. These may have been passed from generation to generation. Abraham's family had been idol worshipers and the people had been exposed to idol worship in Egypt. It is likely many had idols in their possession and they depended on them to some extent. It may have been little more than a good luck charm. The message was clear, "these have no place in the life of a child of God."

We hear much about empowerment today. Everyone wants to feel empowered. Truly, we are. Joshua recognized this truth in dealing with the people. He did not tell they must choose God, but left it up to them. We really do have this right to choose. Furthermore, we **DO** choose! The thing that is missing for most people is a lack of consciousness they are choosing and an even great lack of knowledge of the consequences of this choice. Joshua's leadership is evident in his telling the people his own choice. He led by example. He told them, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

JOSHUA 24:16,22-24 When faced with a time of commitment in a meeting, most will acknowledge the correctness of God's way. It is easy to agree in such a setting. Often at the end of a stirring sermon, preachers will ask for commitment from the people. It may be to pray daily, to have daily devotions in the home, to read the Bible regularly, or to attend all sessions of a revival. Problems come later when we are away from the meeting and in the midst of all the other responsibilities and activities we have. Then commitments are less likely to get the attention they deserve.

Joshua interpreted the commitment of the people as a testimony on their part that they realized the rightness of choosing for God. They knew and we know that choosing for God is "the right thing to do."