

# Proper 16

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August 24, 2003

## Prayer of the Day

God of all creation, you reach out to call people of all nations to your kingdom. As you gather disciples from near and far, count us also among those who boldly confess your Son Jesus Christ as Lord. Amen.

## Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

{1} Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. {2} And Joshua said to all the people.... {14} "Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. {15} Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." {16} Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; {17} for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; {18} and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

Joshua 24 recounts an event in which the people of Israel renew the covenant which was made with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai. The first two verses set the scene, and the rest of the reading describe Joshua's exhortation to the people and their response. "According to the religious ideas of the period... entering a new country meant that the people placed themselves under the jurisdiction of new gods, abandoning their traditional deities for those of the country." [\[1\]](#) Joshua appealed to the people to repudiate this custom, to put away the gods they had served before Sinai and reaffirm their loyalty to Yahweh.

[2b-13: This is a recitation of Israel's history beginning with the call of Abraham, the time in Egypt, the Exodus, and the entry into "a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant." This historical recitation is the basis upon which the Israelites base their decision to continue to worship Yahweh, "for he is our God" (verse 18).]

*15. the region beyond the River:* The region of Mesopotamia from which the Abrahamic people had come.

*the Amorites:* The Amorites were the traditional inhabitants of the lands on the east side of the Jordan.

as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD: "On the one hand we have a group united round Joshua which has already made a choice for Yahweh, while on the other hand there is a second group which is in the process of making the decision." [\[2\]](#).

*16:* The people reject the notion that they would forsake Yahweh.

*17. Therefore we also will serve the Lord for he is our God:* Yahweh had rescued them and protected them, and he has driven out the inhabitants of the land so that the people of Israel may live in it. Yahweh had fulfilled his part of the covenant. Now the people declare their intention to fulfill their part of the covenant.

## Psalm 34:15-22

{15} The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. {16} The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. {17} When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. {18} The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. {19} Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all. {20} He keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken. {21} Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. {22} The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned

Portions of Psalm 34 has been used the previous two Sundays.

15. *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous:* “The ‘righteous man’ experiences a fortunate life, for Yahweh’s eyes are turned toward him, and Yahweh’s ears hear his crying in the hours of distress.” [3]

16. *to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth:* In Psalm 1:4 the wicked are like chaff blown away by the wind. The word for “remembrance” is *zcr*, “name,” their reputation, honor. 18-22: “That the Psalm inculcates no ‘naïve theory of retribution’ is clear especially in vv. 18-20... The reaction of God to their ‘religious good behavior’ does not produce in them an untroubled good life ‘according to plan.’ The ‘good fortune’ (v. 12) of which the psalmist speaks lies at a deeper level... precisely he who despairs of himself stands under the promise of God’s nearness.” [4]

These verses of the Psalm enable us to reflect on the suffering of Israel in bondage in Egypt and their continued suffering during the Exodus. Yet God sustained them in bondage and in their wandering in the wilderness, and fulfilled his promise with the gift of the land of Israel. Throughout their sufferings God was always with them. The wicked perish, the righteous, those for whom Yahweh is their God, will be saved.

## Ephesians 6:10-20

{10} Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. {11} Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. {12} For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. {13} Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. {14} Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. {15} As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. {16} With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. {17} Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. {18} Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. {19} Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, {20} for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

“Ephesians 6:10-20 consists of three main parts: vss. 11-23, vss. 14-17, and vss. 18-20...Part I (vss. 11-13) compares God’s power to an imposing armor which is God’s own, and is now placed at the disposition of the saints for use in an imminent battle... Part II (vss. 14-17) lists the six arms that form this armor. The catalogue appears to follow the several steps which a Roman soldier of Paul’s time would take in preparation for battle... Part III (vss. 18-20) exhorts the saints to be vigilant in prayer and proclamation.” [5]

10: “According to vs. 10 the saints know God’s superior power. They are not left to their own resources, but shall confidently let God work in them and through them.” [6]

11. *the whole armor:* Also in verse 13. “...often the term [*panoplia*] means the full and

complete equipment of a soldier with weapons of offense and defense...It can also serve as a summary description of all the apparel with which a woman 'dresses up' to show herself in public." [7].

13-17: The six armaments mentioned are: belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet and sword. They are identified as truth, righteousness, readiness to proclaim the gospel, faith, salvation and the Spirit.

13. *breastplate of righteousness*: Isaiah 59:17. "Breastplate of faith and love," 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

14. *belt of truth*: Isaiah 5:11, "Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins."

16. *flaming arrows of the evil one*: "Among the 'fiery missals' most frequently used were arrows or spears tipped with tow and dipped in pitch.... Just as the outstanding men of faith, i.e. 'Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephtha, David, Samuel and the Prophets...through faith... quenched raging fire' (Heb 11:32-34), so all the saints 'will be able' to resist the seemingly superior weaponry of the evil spirits that possess (not only psychic or carnal) power." [8].

17. *helmet of salvation*: Isaiah 59:17. See also 1 Thessalonians 5:8, "put on...for a helmet the hope of salvation."

*sword...which is the word of God*: For a connection between the sword and God's word see Isaiah 49:2, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword," and Hebrews 4:12, "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword."

19. *the mystery of the gospel*: "Mystery" is properly "secret." The secret of the Gospel is "the formerly hidden truth: in eternity God was and is determined to draw the Gentiles into his house, and he has now carried out his decision through Jesus Christ (1:10)." [9].

20. *I am an ambassador in chains*: Paul wrote this letter from prison. "Paul demonstrates that he has accepted his captivity without bitterness and bears it with good humor. He denotes his ministry with the political-legal term 'ambassador' which includes the full power to represent a potentate or a government. In II Cor 5:20 the same title describes Paul as God's spokesman...." [10].

*Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak*: The prayers of the saints in Ephesus will support Paul as he speaks the gospel boldly.

~~John 6:50-69~~ eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. {57} Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. {58} This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." {59} He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. {60} When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" {61} But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? {62} Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? {63} It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. {64} But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. {65} And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." {66} Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. {67} So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" {68} Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. {69} We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Jesus is teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum (6:59). Later he will be going about Galilee (7:1). 6:60-69 may also have taken place in the synagogue. Verses 56-58 were included in the Gospel last Sunday.

56. *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me*: "...in terms of antilanguage, to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood is synonymous with the words *to welcome, accept, receive, believe into*, and the like. In Israel's tradition, the question of eating flesh and blood is raised

in passages dealing with sacrifice. In this perspective the nuance here is accepting Jesus even in spite of his being ‘lifted up’ and ‘glorified’ on the cross.” [\[11\]](#).

60. *his disciples*: See also verses 61 and 66. The disciples, here at least in John, are an indeterminate group, of which “the twelve” is a sub-set.

*This teaching is difficult*: “This teaching” is Jesus statement in verse 56, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me.” The disciples have taken Jesus’ statement literally, and are horrified by it. Many are not able to accept it and desert him (verses 64, 66). The woes pronounced on Capernaum, among other cities, in the Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:15 may reflect the same lack of faith in Jesus as displayed here among the disciples (from Capernaum?).

61-62. *Does this offend you?* Jesus raises the level again, if this offends you then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending? If you would be offended by that, then you had better leave.

63. *It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is useless*: This verse was used by Zwingli to counter Luther’s insistence on the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. Neither Zwingli nor Luther interpreted John 6 as dealing with the sacrament. Rather, for both the eating referred to is a ‘spiritual’ eating. For Luther, the flesh spoken of here is not the flesh of the incarnate Logos, but general, sinful, human flesh. *Our* flesh, *our* wisdom and strength, *our* intention and desire, *our* piety and good works, *our* determination and fleshly ‘faith’ are of no avail. The proverb implies that human wisdom cannot understand the gifts of God. One who is spiritual will understand and live.

64. *the one that would betray him*: Judas is placed with those who do not believe.

65. *no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father*: Faith in Jesus is not the act of a free will, but a gift from God. Lest this become a sort of double pre-destination we need to remember 6:40: “This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

67. *the twelve*: The twelve clearly means the small group of intimate followers Jesus had gathered around himself.

68-69: Peter answers on behalf of the twelve. This verse has been called “the Johannine equivalent of Caesarea Philippi.” [\[12\]](#). In the synoptics Peter confesses Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:13), or something similar (Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). Here the unusual title, “Holy One of God,” is used of Jesus by Peter. In Mark 1:24, Luke 4:34 Jesus is called this by an unclean spirit. In Psalm 106:16 Aaron is called “the holy one of Yahweh.”

## Reflection

People of all nations are called to God’s kingdom. It is our prayer that we may be among those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and enter the kingdom as his brothers and sisters. God provides armor appropriate to the battles that face us: truth, righteousness, salvation, faith, the word of God. With it we are ready to stand firm in our struggle. We show our faithfulness by accepting Jesus in spite of the world’s hostility toward him, and toward those who follow him. He alone has the words of eternal life. He is the Holy One of God.

## Hymns [\[13\]](#)

*With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).  
E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

268 E Now that the  
493 D Hope of the  
365 I Built on a  
188 II I Bind unto  
308 II God the Father,

709vG Eat this Bread (772s)  
702vG I Am the Bread (762s)  
700vG I Received (761s)  
701vG What Feast of Love  
211, 228/9, 389

**Prayers of the People** [14].

O God, we use the words of Peter and sing, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." We have come together again to acknowledge our need and your supply, our simple praise and thanksgiving. We have not the gifts of Solomon, but what we have we bring; ourselves with the time, the abilities and the gifts you first gave. God of the Kingdom beyond all houses of worship hear our prayer. Encourage and direct all of us your servants. Help us to follow Jesus our leader into every avenue and corner of life.

Strengthen us to be there for one another as servants of God in Christ Jesus. We remember today those who will gather in Calgary this week for the Diaconal Formation and Community Week. . Bless, inform and shape them for the tasks to which you have called them. God of the Kingdom beyond all houses of worship hear our prayer.

**Or** [15]*Presider or deacon*

As we proclaim the gospel of faith, let us pray in the Spirit for the desperate needs of all peoples.

*Deacon or other leader*

For this holy gathering, for the people of God in every place, and for all who seek the Lord.

For the mercy, justice, and peace among all peoples.

For students and teachers, and all those returning to their studies.

For abundant fruits of the earth, and for safety from violent storms.

For the sick and the suffering, travelers and those on vacation, prisoners, captives, and their families, and all those in danger and need.

For our city and those who live in it, and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

Blessed are you, God of Israel, whose words are spirit and life. Hear the prayers we offer this day and feed us with the bread of heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Notes**

[1] J. Albert Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972, p. 236.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

[3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 386.

[4] *Loc. cit.*

[5] Marcus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1974, p. 784.

[6] *Loc. cit.*

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 761.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 774.

[9] *Ibid.* p. 781.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 782.

[11] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 134.

[12] Mary Shorter, "The Position of Chapter VI in the Fourth Gospel," *Expository Times* 84(1973)182.

[13] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclb9900.txt>

[14] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray\\_b2.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt)

[15] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>