

Celebrating What God Has Done!

Joshua 24:1-26
October 19, 2025

Please open your Bibles today to Joshua 24. Virginia is the birthplace of our nation and a state of firsts. The first permanent English settlement in the New World was founded at Jamestown 1607. In 2028, the FFA will celebrate its 100th birthday but two years earlier, in 1926, it was born first in VA and the first chapter was down Weyer's Cave. Here in the Old Dominion, we lay claim to much history and we could go on for a while for we are the birthplace of many things. Nancy and I spent our vacation in TN this past week and we tried to visit the birthplace of the man who invented the toothbrush. But we couldn't find it. There was no plaque. Say Birthplace.

Antioch is also a birthplace. God used this facility to give birth to FPSC as well as Shen Valley Coalition for Christ and SCWREA. This sanctuary is also the delivery room where the Covenant Brethren Church was born 5 years ago this Friday. After many years of prayer, discussion, study, and agonizing, about 200 individuals met right here at Antioch in the fall of 2020. We worshipped together on Friday evening, October 23 in the midst of Covid. When we drove into the parking lot the next morning, a double rainbow arched over the building. It was later that very afternoon that Bro Craig Alan Myers made the motion from over in this area to officially launch the Covenant Brethren Church five years ago this Friday. Bro Grover Duling seconded it and it passed overwhelmingly. Bro Jim Myer then led us in singing, We're Marching To Zion and the first 12 churches were admitted from Tennessee, North Carolina, and West Virginia. Happy Anniversary to us!

It's hard to believe that a baby could grow so quickly but in five short years, it has grown to 211 congregations scattered throughout 12 countries on four continents with over 14,000 members. Although the Executive Board had discussed international missions early on, we decided that would have to wait until the CBC had grown larger. God had other plans and began supersizing us from the beginning. Two months ago, the number of CBC congregations overseas surpassed the number in the US. And the Executive Board will consider adding yet more congregations and members this coming weekend when we meet in WV. No one, including those who took the lead in founding this denomination had any idea this would ever happen. To God be the glory for what He has done, is doing, and will yet do.

To help us celebrate CBC Sunday, we're going to read from a passage where Joshua spoke to the Israelites and reminded them of where they had been, what God had done in their past and challenged them to live into being God's people in the newly conquered Promised Land. If you are able, please stand as we read from Josh 24:1 Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. 2 Joshua said to

all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. 3 But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, 4 and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. '"Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out."

Joshua then goes through some of their national history over the preceding years hitting the highlights and reminding them of God's guidance and blessings all along the way. The Red Sea crossing, the armies they faced in the desert, the crossing of the Jordan and the battle at Jericho. He also reminded them of how God had conquered the land for them and given it into their hands. Now that it was all theirs and their battles were all over, now that Joshua was about to die, he said, in Vs 14 "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served 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 to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! 17 It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. 18 And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."

Vs 25 On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. 26 And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

This gathering of all the Israelites to affirm and renew God's covenant with them reminds us of what we do here today on this 5th anniversary of CBC. As Joshua did with the Israelites, let me remind us of a bit of our history before we reaffirm our own covenant with God and with each other. In your bulletin today is a brief history that I will not read but encourage you to do so later today. History is as important to people, countries and organizations as roots are to a tree. Just as a tree cannot survive without its roots, we cannot remain who we are if we forget what God has done in our past. Fred Craddock has said that to be Christian is to be enrolled in a story, and anybody who can't remember any further back than his or her birth is an orphan. We don't and we must not worship our past. But many times throughout Scripture, God told the Israelites to remember that He had brought them out of Egypt, how He did it, and that they had been slaves. The Passover itself was an annual reminder of their history that formed and shaped them to be who they were. Whenever they forgot their past, they strayed from the

Lord and ended up in trouble. Let's review a bit of where we came from that we might not make their same mistake.

On October 31 of 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on a church door in Germany. These were serious concerns he had about the Roman Catholic Church, most of which were ways they were ignoring or contradicting the holy scriptures. Without intending to, Luther sparked what is now known as the Protestant Reformation resulting in not just the Lutheran Church but nearly every other denomination that now exists. Europe became a battleground of ideas as the Pope tried to reign in the many movements that began rebelling against his rules and authority. Europe also became a literal battleground for the next couple centuries as various kings and countries fought each other, mostly over religious differences that boiled down to money and power. Imagine that.

Zwingli, Calvin and others also pushed for reform. But there were some who didn't think any of these went far enough. One particular group led by Conrad Grebel, began teaching that infant baptism was not valid since the Bible gives not one example of it and instead teaches that individuals must make their own decisions to follow Jesus. Although virtually all of these had been baptized as infants into the Catholic Church, several were rebaptized in Zurich, Switzerland on January 21, 1525 to declare their own faith in Jesus. As such they became known as anabaptists meaning re-baptized and the movement continued to spread. And they often were persecuted by both Catholics and Lutherans for they are sometimes called the Radical Reformers who dared to break the mold. When Nancy and I were waiting for our meal in a small town in Switzerland where the Gochenours originated, we looked through a book that depicted bitter torture of these religious reformers. This year of 2025 marks the 500th anniversary of the anabaptist movement of which we Brethren are a part. Happy Anniversary to us!

Various anabaptist leaders continued to preach and teach and although many were put to death for being rebaptized, their numbers continued to swell. One early leader was Menno Simons from whom the Mennonites get their name. There were Hutterites, Moravians, Quakers, and others. One anabaptist preacher, Ernst Hochmann, influenced a young miller named Alexander Mack. Mack and some other young people met for Bible studies and became increasingly convinced that the official church, to which they all belonged, was not the true church. On an early August morning in 1708, 5 men and 3 women were rebaptized in the Eder River in Schwarzenau, Germany thus launching what became known as the Brethren movement 317 years ago. They were called Brethren because that's what they called each other. They were determined to obey the Bible as closely as possible, just as it read. They sought to copy the early church in the New Testament and so they instituted the Love Feast, the holy kiss, and other Biblical commands. They combined Anabaptist teachings with those of the Pietists, who loved pie, thus all the fellowship meals. No, pietists emphasized study of the Bible and the inner spiritual life leading to godly lifestyles. As such, the Brethren became known as

people of the Book. THE Book, God's book, the Holy Bible. What does the Bible say? How can we do it?

These early Brethren also became targets of persecution and although Alexander Mack's father was the town mayor, Mack and his growing group had to start moving to avoid persecution. They eventually came to America and founded the first Brethren Church here in Germantown just outside of Philadelphia. The original building still stands. Once in this country, the Brethren grew through both large families and evangelism. Over the years, their overriding goal was to stay true to Biblical teachings and live them out the best they could.

Along the way, there were some who broke off including a group that built the Ephrata Cloister in PA in 1728. But most remained true to the main body as it grew westward into Ohio and Indiana and south into the Shenandoah Valley and beyond. The first major splits occurred in the early 1880s when the ultra conservatives split to the right, and what is now the Ashland Brethren group split to the left over disagreements on higher education, Sunday Schools, and how to dress. In 1908, the main body changed their name from The German Baptist Brethren to the Church of the Brethren. Some smaller groups broke off from time to time but the main body stayed together.

As the 20th century progressed, many local congregations remained true to Scripture, but on a national level, the denomination began drifting from its Biblical roots. This snowballed in the last 20 years of the 1900s and the first 20 years of the 2000s. Although the COB had, and still has, pretty clear papers that call abortion sin as well as LGBT lifestyles, many individuals and congregations ignored these papers that were built on the Bible. Many efforts were made during that time to hold the body true to God's Word and I became a part of that serving on the denominational Standing Committee for 6 years, but it became increasingly clear these efforts were failing. The Brethren were no longer people of the Book, but people of the culture, people of the world, people of the times. Several congregations started leaving the COB to become independent. In response, several of what are now leaders of the CBC met a number of times before coming to Antioch in October of 2019 where the name was chosen here in this room. Covenant Brethren Church was chosen by one vote over Bible Brethren.

And one year later, five years ago this coming Friday, the official decision was made to launch CBC. Praise God for what He has done, is doing, and will yet do! I'm working on a more detailed history before the details are lost but as we worship today, our CBC brothers and sisters are meeting in Venezuela, Panama, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Spain, and other nations. We have congregations who want to know more about CBC in Honduras, Ecuador, the Netherlands, and other African countries as well as ones in the US that continue to join. It's very difficult to keep up with and stay on top of and you can see the CBC map above the resource table in the fellowship hall. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes! I'm thankful for Antioch's

courage for being the first in the Shenandoah District to leave and join CBC by a unanimous vote.

But we must not become proud or lax. Either of these will lead straight to hell not only for us but for those who follow us. In February of 2020, CBC adopted the Statement of Faith that you find a copy of in your bulletins. Get your magnifying glass out. Larger ones are available. This Statement of Faith is the touchstone for CBC. Congregations and pastors seeking to join must affirm what is written in this simple document. These are really a summary of basic Christian teachings that were accepted by nearly every Christian church up until a few decades ago. One of the things I love about our SOF is that on the larger version, each of these items has one or more footnotes all of which cite Biblical references. It's all about the Bible. Before Antioch was ever CBC, we had already adopted our Mission Statement the first line of which says Antioch is a Bible based church. May we always be!

The CBC Statement of Faith briefly states our basic beliefs. What we believe about the Bible, who we believe God is, how we are saved, and who the church is. It also specifies our belief that God ordained marriage is between one man and one woman and that all human life is sacred from the womb to the tomb. The other affirmations on the back regard how we are to live out our beliefs and highlight practices such as anointing, Love Feast, baptizing three times forward, and etc. This is not all we believe. It is a summary of our beliefs particularly about aspects of Christianity that are being attacked and polluted today. There are preachers, for example, some of whom in the COB who will tell you that Jesus is not the only way to heaven and that His blood is not required. If that's true, a perfectly sinless Son of God died for no good reason. Such heresy and garbage. The CBC also emphasizes accountability whereby pastors can and will lose their credentials if we teach and preach what is contrary to the statement of faith and congregations can be removed for the same reason. While no denomination, no congregation, and no person is perfect, our goal is to be faithful to Jesus and to God's will as revealed in the holy Scriptures.

Psalms 12:6 tells us, "And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times." That's pure. Flawless means there's not a single error. At all. Period. None. Although the Bible has been attacked by many and often, time and again, it is proved true. It's not a history book but where it speaks to history, archaeology is proving it true. In fact, Archaeologists have discovered at Shechem what may be the exact rock that Joshua set up in today's Scripture. It's not a geography textbook, but where it mentions locations, they are accurate. It's not a science book, but where it alludes to scientific principles, modern science verifies every word. And if it is true in all these respects, it is true in what it tells us of God and our relationship to Him. We ignore, discount, or change it to our own destruction. Those who seek to add to or take away from God's Word receive a curse from God. He knows what He's doing, He knows how to inspire human beings to write it down, and He knows how to preserve

through all generations. We may not always understand it completely, we may disagree about how to interpret or apply some parts of it, but we must NOT attempt to change or dismiss it. Mack and the early Brethren were so right about that and CBC seeks to get back to Mack and that's a fact. God's Word is eternal, it is God-breathed, and it is sufficient.

Let's speak of Covenant a bit before we finish. Say Covenant. A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties that is grounded not in law, but in relationship. A contract usually involves the exchange of goods or services and is purely transactional, while a covenant is a deeper relational bond built on personal commitment and shared purpose. Throughout the Bible, God makes covenants with human beings. He made covenants with Adam and Noah, with Abraham, and another with Moses and the Israelites, and another with David. Even when we have not kept our part of the covenant, God has and does, because His covenants are founded and grounded in His eternal love. God instituted the highest and most wonderful covenant in the Upper Room when Jesus said in Luke 22:20, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." God has promised in this new covenant, or new testament, to save us not by us keeping His rules and laws, but by the precious blood of His Son. Two Sundays ago we celebrated and reaffirmed His new covenant during our Love Feast and even today He invites every human being to enter this covenant with Him. We become His people, and He becomes our God. Because of His love and sacrifice for us, we honor our end of the covenant by obeying Him in love and service.

So too, in the Covenant Brethren Church, we not only have this relationship with God through His Son, we also enter into a covenant agreement with each other. We agree to be brothers and sisters living together in obedience to God's Word according to the Statement of Faith. We do this understanding none of us are perfect but desiring to live up to the highest aspirations of faithfulness and a desire to encourage and hold others to this standard as well. We covenant together in the Antioch congregation, and we covenant together with the other 13 congregations in the Blue Ridge Region from Collinsville, VA to Frederick, Md. And we covenant together with the other congregations in the US and with those many congregations scattered throughout the world. As the Israelites joined together at Shechem to reaffirm their covenant with God, let us likewise reaffirm our covenant with Him and with our brothers and sisters in the Covenant Brethren Church. If you are willing to continue in this covenant together, will you say, I will. And let us join in the responsive prayer found in your bulletin.