



## Joshua - Chapter Five

### I Joshua 1:1-5:15 - Crossing into the Land (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Five

With Israel now finally in the Promised Land, after so many years of living in the desert, the urge to begin the conquest must have been powerful. However, this chapter underscores matters of even greater importance. The reinstatement of the covenant sign of circumcision (vv.2-9) and the celebration of Passover (vv.10-12) remind God's people of their privileged covenant relationship with him, signified by circumcision, and of their redemption out of bondage by him, signified by the Passover. These two fundamentally important rites are paralleled in the NT by baptism, the sign of covenant relationship: <<*In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead*>> (Colossians 2:11-12), and the Lord's Supper, the celebration of redemption from the bondage of sin through the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God: <<*So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there'*>> (Mark 14:13-15).

Observing circumcision and the Passover at this occasion requires that Israel act by faith: both to trust God for protection while they are vulnerable (vv.5:8), and to commit themselves afresh to basing their life in the land on their identity as God's people, i.e. not simply as a political entity. Fittingly, an encounter with the commander of the army of the Lord reminds Joshua of his

reliance on the Lord (vv.13-15) and, with its militaristic overtones, anticipates the commencement of the conquest in Chapter 6.

#### I.d Joshua 5:1-15 - Ritual renewal and divine encounter

Refer to the chapter summary above.

##### I.d.i Joshua 5:1-9 - The New Generation Circumcised

Because of the mighty act of God in drying up the River Jordan, all the surrounding nations were in fear of the Israelites, yet they did not press forward with an attack. Instead, the Lord instructed Joshua to have all the men circumcised according to the covenant agreement he had made since all the circumcised men who had left Egypt had died in the wilderness and none of their children had yet been circumcised. And so it was done.

<sup>1</sup> When all the kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts failed, and there was no longer any spirit in them, because of the Israelites.

#### Joshua 5:1

Even before Israel did anything to take the land, the Lord went before and demoralised the enemy so that **there was no longer any spirit in them**. This verse is transitional: it completes the account of the Jordan crossing by noting its effects on those whom the Lord would drive out of the land, and it explains how it is possible for Israel to exist unopposed in enemy territory long enough for the events of Chapter 5 to take place.

**Their hearts failed** is reminiscent of the way Joseph's brothers felt after they had been to Egypt to collect food during the famine and they believed God was punishing them for their sin in selling their brother into captivity: <<*He said to his brothers, 'My money has been put back; here it is in my sack!' At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?'*>> (Genesis 42:28).

<sup>2</sup> At that time the Lord said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time.'<sup>3</sup> So Joshua made flint knives, and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth.

#### Joshua 5:2-3

**Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time**. Circumcision was widely practiced in the ancient Near East: <<*The days are surely coming, says*

*the Lord, when I will attend to all those who are circumcised only in the foreskin: Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and all those with shaven temples who live in the desert. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart*>> (Jeremiah 9:25-26), but not universally. The Philistines were not circumcised: <<*Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armour, 'Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will act for us; for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few'*>> (1 Samuel 14:6), nor, apparently, were some inhabitants of Canaan: <<*They said to them, 'We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us'*>> (Genesis 34:14).

Unlike its significance in Egypt, for instance, where circumcision marked a rite of passage, in Israel circumcision was a sign of the covenant instituted by Yahweh in Genesis 17:10-14 and was to be administered to all males when they were eight days old.

The need to circumcise the Israelite men under Joshua's command a second time is explained in vv.4-7.

The use of flint knives, even in a time period when metal instruments had been developed, may attest to the antiquity of the practice: <<*But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, 'Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!'*>> (Exodus 4:25), or it may have to do with the need for many instruments at one time. Flint, or obsidian, was readily available and was particularly well suited. An Egyptian text, dated to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Century BC, speaks of one hundred and twenty young men being circumcised at one time. The inscription on a similarly dated Egyptian tomb relief depicting circumcision indicates that flint knives were used.

<sup>4</sup> This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the warriors, had died during the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> Although all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people born on the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. <sup>6</sup> For the Israelites travelled for forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished, not having listened to the voice of the Lord. To them the Lord swore that he would not let them see the land that he had sworn to their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>7</sup> So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

### Joshua 5:4-7

Joshua makes clear the reason why there was a new generation born in the wilderness: because the old generation had not listened to the voice of the Lord, and would not go in to take the land as he had commanded them.

A land flowing with milk and honey. A land particularly suited to agrarian existence, Israel's new home would flow with milk from goat herding and honey. Perhaps, in addition to naturally occurring bee's honey, there was also the syrup derived from boiling down figs or grapes. Refer also to Exodus 3:17, 13:5, Leviticus 20:24, Numbers 13:27, and Deuteronomy 6:3.

So it was their children, that Joshua circumcised. Circumcision was always a powerful act of consecration to God. In it, an Israelite said "I'm not like the other nations. I listen to God and do what he says I should do." It was stepping out in faithful obedience and identifying oneself as part of the Lord's people. It was renouncing the flesh and the world. It was dying to self and living to God: <<*You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*>> (Ephesians 4:22-24).

This new generation was raised up in the place of the generation of unbelief. God's work would go on, but the people of God who had not believed would not share in it: <<*Therefore in my anger I swore, 'They shall not enter my rest'*>> (Psalm 95:11).

<sup>8</sup> When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. <sup>9</sup> The Lord said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.' And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

### Joshua 5:8-9

They remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. Obviously, this was suicidal from a military standpoint. All the men of fighting age were made completely vulnerable and unable to fight for a period of several days, until they were healed.

Genesis 34:24-25 describes how Simeon and Levi killed all the men in a city after tricking their leaders into having them all circumcised. While the men were unable to fight properly, they were slaughtered in retaliation, because the prince of that city had raped Dinah, the sister of Simeon and Levi. This could have been the fate of Israel here in Chapter 5.

So, not only did Israel cross over the Jordan at a militarily undesirable place, right in front of Jericho - the strongest military outpost of the Canaanites, they also incapacitated their army for several days. They did this because they trusted in God and his directions, instead of their own wisdom. They were put in the place where they could trust in nothing but God alone, a hard place but a good place. God only asked this of them after he showed his greatness by the Jordan River crossing. When people remember all the things the power of God has done in their lives, they are willing to trust him with a radical obedience.

The name Gilgal sounds similar to a Hebrew verb meaning ‘to roll’, Hebrew *galal*), and a noun meaning ‘wheel’, Hebrew *galgal*, and thus is aptly associated with the Lord having rolled away the disgrace of Egypt. The disgrace may have been the aspersions the Egyptians would have cast on Israel had the Lord not succeeded in bringing them into the land: <<*Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth”? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people*>> (Exodus 32:12), <<*But Moses said to the Lord, ‘Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for in your might you brought up this people from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of this people; for you, O Lord, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go in front of them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, 16 “It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness”*>> (Numbers 14:13-16), and: <<*otherwise the land from which you have brought us might say, “Because the Lord was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to let them die in the wilderness”*>> (Deuteronomy 9:28), or it may refer to the disgrace or reproach represented in the disobedient generation that has now died (vv.4-6).

God called Israel to a place where they saw themselves as they were in him. By faith, they could see themselves as an obedient, trusting people, and to stop seeing themselves as they were in their slavery and bondage. Of course, this is the same work God wants to do in Christians, taking away the dishonour and shame of their previous sin and rebellion, and seeing themselves as who they are in Jesus. How was the reproach rolled away? By their radical trust and obedience to God, by taking the specific action he told them to.

#### I.d.ii Joshua 5:10-12 - The Passover at Gilgal

The Israelites celebrate the Passover as ordained by law, eating the produce of the land and no longer the manna from heaven.

<sup>10</sup> While the Israelites were encamped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho.

### Joshua 5:10

For the institution of the Passover, which celebrated Israel's deliverance from the judgement that befell the Egyptians in Exodus Chapter 12; the timing of the Passover is given in Exodus 12:18 and Leviticus 23:5, as well as other texts. Preparation for the first Passover meal, shortly before Israel's departure from Egypt, took place according to Exodus 12:3 on the tenth day of the first month, which is known by its pre-exilic name Abib or Nisan following the return from Babylon, overlapping with modern March/April. The notice in Joshua 4:19a that *<<The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month>>* suggests a parallel; the transition from wandering in the wilderness to arrival in the land was a kind of 'second exodus.' In the first exodus, the Passover preceded the crossing of the Red Sea. In this 'second exodus,' it followed the crossing of the River Jordan.

The original Passover itself could never be repeated, but there was power in its remembrance. They were to always live remembering that they were a people delivered, and remembering God's work of deliverance. In the same way, Christians are to be in constant remembrance of their redemption at Calvary, and live their lives in the shadow of the Cross: *<<Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed>>* (1 Corinthians 5:7).

<sup>11</sup> On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. <sup>12</sup> The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

### Joshua 5:11-12

The manna ceased. Commensurate with their changed status, the people of Israel can now enjoy the fruit of the land of Canaan. When the people were able to provide for themselves from the rich produce of Canaan, God stopped the manna. He did not want them to get lazy, but to enter into a new partnership of trust with him. They had to trust God to bring the manna every day: *<<The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan>>* (Exodus 16:35); but they also had to trust him to provide for them through other means: *<<Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from*

*heaven to eat.” Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’>> (John 6:31-33).*

They ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year. God always provides; but he is perfectly free to change the source of his provision from time to time. His people need to trust in him, not in his manner of provision or they may stumble when that changes: <<*Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them’>> (John 11:9-10).*

The city of Gilgal became a beachhead and camp for Israel in their conquest of Canaan. They returned there after battle and remembered, finding strength in the remembrance of the memorial of Joshua 4:20, their obedience, and their redemption. It is good to have a place like Gilgal in life. This is a place where people first come into God’s promises, a place of memorial, a place of obedience, a place of hope and of redemption.

#### I.d.iii Joshua 5:13-15 - Joshua’s Vision

Joshua encounters the commander of the army of the Lord, which some take to be a theophany of the pre-incarnate Messiah because Joshua worships him.

<sup>13</sup> Once when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, ‘Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?’

<sup>14</sup> He replied, ‘Neither; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped, and he said to him, ‘What do you command your servant, my lord?’

#### Joshua 5:13-14

Joshua looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua boldly approaches this mysterious man with a drawn sword. As a shepherd over God’s people, he has a responsibility to see if this man is a friend or a foe.

The expression with a drawn sword in his hand appears in Numbers 22:23 and 1 Chronicles 21:16, where it refers to the angel of the Lord as the agent of God’s seal. The way that v.15 evokes Exodus 3:5 reinforces this identification and shows that the angel of the Lord is often a manifestation of the Lord himself.

The army of the Lord is the force God commands when judging: <<*Listen, a tumult on the mountains as of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The Lord of hosts is mustering an army for battle*>> (Isaiah 13:4), or protecting: <<*Then Micaiah said, 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him'*>> (1 Kings 22:19). It is the army that Christ will lead when he rides out in judgement on the whole world: <<*Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war*>> (Revelation 19:11), <<*And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses*>> (Revelation 19:14).

Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries? Joshua's question is basically, "Whose side are you on?" To this question the commander of the army of the Lord rightly answers Neither. In other words, not in the sense that Joshua is asking the question, assuming a merely human ally or enemy. Far from suggesting a lack of commitment to his people, the Lord underscores his commitment by marshalling his hosts on their behalf.

In a sense, the commander refuses to answer Joshua's question because it is not the right question, and it is not the most important question to be asked at the time. The question really was not if the Lord was on Joshua's side. The proper question was if Joshua was on the Lord's side.

Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped. Joshua knew he was inferior to the commander; and it seems probable that he believed he was in God's very presence for he would not worship a created being: <<*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!'*>> (Revelation 22:8-10). Exodus 23:20-33 relates God's promise of his angel to secure Israel's success in conquest.

Many commentators, theologians and Christians generally believe this to be one of many theophanies of the pre-incarnate Christ. The idea of Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, appearing as a man before Bethlehem is provocative, but logical. It is known that he existed before Bethlehem: <<*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days*>> (Micah 5:2); why should he not, on isolated but important occasions, appear in bodily form? This idea is also evident in passages like Genesis 18:16-33, Genesis 32:24-30, and Judges 13:1-23. Joshua's total submission to Jesus Christ shows that he knows who is really in charge. It also is a virtual guarantee of victory for Israel.

Why did Jesus come to Israel at this strategic time? He had come to instruct Joshua in the plan to capture Jericho. Joshua will carry out a plan in the following chapter that is so improbable it could only have been initiated at the direct command of God. Most of all, he had come to conquer Israel, before Israel could conquer anything else in the Promised Land, they had to be conquered by God, and Joshua's total submission shows that they are conquered by him. This is the missing element in a life of victory for many Christians; they have not been, and are not continually being, conquered by God.

<sup>15</sup> The commander of the army of the Lord said to Joshua, 'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy.' And Joshua did so.

### Joshua 5:15

Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy. This is yet another indication of Joshua's status as Moses' successor as Joshua receives the same instructions Moses did at the burning bush: <<*Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground'*>> (Exodus 3:5).