

Joshua Chapter 5

Joshua 5:1 "And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which [were] on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which [were] by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel."

“Heard”: Reports of God’s supernaturally opening a crossing struck fear into the Canaanites. The miracle was all the more incredible and shocking since God performed it when the Jordan was swollen to flood height (3:15). To the people in the Land, this miracle was a powerful demonstration proving that God is mighty (4:24). This came on top of reports about the Red Sea miracle (2:10).

That the “heart” of the Amorite and Canaanite kings “melted” at the report of this miracle directly fulfilled God’s promise (in 4:23). “Neither was there spirit in them” means simply that they feared the Israelites and had lost the will to fight.

We find that Rahab had spoken the truth about the hearts of the people being melted in terror of their destiny. They are not terrified of Israel, but of Israel's God. The Amorites on the east side of Jordan have already been defeated. That, along with the knowledge that God dried up the Jordan River for their passage, has frightened the people of Canaan into not resisting the Israelites. In fact, the people of the land are in a state of shock. They have lost the spirit to fight.

Verses 2-9: God places a premium on preparation (see the lives of Moses and Joseph), so even though the Israelites had crossed the Jordan, they were not ready to take Jericho. First, all the males had to be “circumcised”, a lapsed practice during their time in the wilderness. Circumcision was a physical sign of the nation’s covenant with God (Gen. 17:9-14), marking them as His people. It symbolized what God’s people were to do to their hearts (Deut. 10:16), and anticipated a time when God would circumcise the hearts of His people, enabling them to love Him (Deut. 30:6). This promised circumcision is accomplished for New Testament believers by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:29; Col. 2:11-12).

Joshua 5:2 "At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time."

“Circumcise”: God commanded Joshua to see that this was done to all males under 40. These were sons of the generation who died in the wilderness, survivors (compare verses 6-7), from the new generation God spared in (Numbers chapters 13 and 14). This surgical sign of a faith commitment to the Abrahamic Covenant (see Gen. 17:9-14), had been ignored during the wilderness trek. Now God wanted it reinstated, so the Israelites would start out right in the Land they were possessing (See note on Jer. 4:4).

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (compare Gen. 12:1-3; 17:10-14). As Moses circumcised his sons before the first Passover (Exodus 4:24-26), and led a circumcised people out of Egypt (verse 5), so "Joshua" would lead a circumcised army into Canaan. Apparently, the rite had been neglected during the years in the wilderness (verses 6-7). The incapacity of the army for fighting would demand their total faith and reliance upon God. Moreover, the proper observance of the Passover, held before the campaign for Jericho (verse 10), demanded that it be observed by those who were duly circumcised (Exodus 12:44, 48). With the renewal of circumcision and the Passover, a sanctified people were ready for God to lead them into the holy warfare that lay ahead (compare Deut. 20:1-4).

This does not mean to circumcise someone who has already been circumcised. This is speaking of those born on the trip across the wilderness, who have grown up uncircumcised. This cutting away of the flesh of the foreskin symbolizes the cutting away of worldliness. The Christian is circumcised in his heart.

Colossians 2:11 "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:"

Romans 2:29 "But he [is] a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision [is that] of the heart, in the spirit, [and] not in the letter; whose praise [is] not of men, but of God."

Joshua 5:3 "And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins."

Not that Joshua circumcised them himself, any more than he made the knives himself. But he ordered both to be done, and took care that they were done. And as any that had skill might make the knives, so might any circumcise. Circumcision was not restrained to any order of men. Not to the priests and Levites, but any might perform it. So that though the number to be circumcised was great, it might soon be finished. And this was done;

"At the hill of the foreskins": As the place was afterward called from hence": These being heaped up one upon another. Made a hill of them, as the Jews say, being covered with dust. This circumcision performed by Joshua or his orders, was typical of the spiritual circumcision without hands, which those that believe in Jesus, the antitype of Joshua, partake of.

This just names the place the circumcisions took place here.

Joshua 5:4 "And this [is] the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, [that were] males, [even] all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt."

Or the reason of the command given him to circumcise the children of Israel at this time. Namely, what follows.

"All the people that came out of Egypt that were males, even all the men of war": Meaning such that were twenty years old, and upwards.

"Died in the wilderness, by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Not directly, but in a course of forty years, as they journeyed through the wilderness. This is to be understood with an exception of Joshua, Caleb, Eleazar, etc. But then there was a large number who were under twenty years of age, that came out of Egypt and were now living.

Joshua 5:5 "Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people [that were] born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, [them] they had not circumcised."

All that came out of Egypt, and males, were circumcised, whether under or above twenty years of age. For though it is possible all were circumcised before they came out of Egypt, which favors the opinion of Dr. Lightfoot, that they might be circumcised during the three nights' darkness of the Egyptians. When they could take no advantage of it, as Levi and Simeon did of the Shechemites. And which seems more probable than that it should be on the night they came out of Egypt, when many must have been unfit for travelling. And seems preferable to that of their being circumcised at Mount Sinai, which was a year after their coming out of Egypt.

"But all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way, as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised": The reasons of which is neglected (see Joshua 5:2). The phrase, "by the way", seems to point at the true reason of it, at least to countenance the reason there given, which was on account of their journey. That is, their stay at any place being uncertain and precarious. So the Jews say, because of the affliction or trouble of journeying, the Israelites did not circumcise their children. This is to be understood of all males only born in the wilderness, they only being the subjects of circumcision.

Since the time of Abraham, the Hebrew men had been circumcised on the eighth day. During the wilderness wanderings, they had not circumcised the boy babies on the eighth day. The circumcising of the men was a symbol of their covenant with God. This would be a renewing of their covenant with God.

Joshua 5:6 "For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people [that were] men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that he would not show them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey."

Wanting a few days, the round number is given. Not forty two years, as the Septuagint version.

"Till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed": All that were above twenty years of age, excepting Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness.

"Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord": But murmured against him, and against his servants, and particularly against Aaron, being the high priest. And chiefly because of the report of the spies, and their murmurs then, which so incensed the Lord against them, that he threatened them with an entire consumption of their carcasses. And which accordingly was fulfilled, to which the following clause refers.

"Unto whom the Lord sware, that he would not show them the land which the Lord sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey" (see Num. 14:23).

We remember, the rebellious people who had come to the Promised Land 38 years earlier, and could not go in because of their lack of faith in God. God punished them by extending the wanderings, until those who were 20 years old or older, died off. The next generation, who had not lacked faith in God, inherited the Promised Land of milk and honey.

Joshua 5:7 "And their children, [whom] he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way."

Who were born to them in the wilderness, and succeeded them, some of which might be near forty years of age. As for those that were born before, of which there might be many now living, they had been circumcised already, but others, were not.

"For they were circumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way": Or while journeying the forty years in the wilderness. Which, as before observed, seems to be the true reason of the omission of circumcision.

The covenant was sealed with this circumcision of all the men. This is a recognition of their covenant with God. Every male from 8 days old to time of death, was circumcised.

Joshua 5:8 "And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole."

"Till they were whole": This speaks of the time needed to recover from such a painful and potentially infected wound.

This was a short time to rest, until they were healed.

Joshua 5:9 "And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day."

A play on words occurs here. "Gilgal" ("Rolling away"), marks the place where God "rolled away the reproach of Egypt". Israel's era of shameful captivity now came officially to an end. After the men were circumcised, God promised to roll away "the reproach of Egypt", vindicating the Israelites. By His miracle of bringing the people into the Land, God removed (rolled away), the ridicule which the Egyptians had heaped on them. The inheritance of Canaan lay ahead (compare 1:6; 21:43-45). The same verbal root marks the New Testament site of Golgotha, the place where mankind's captivity by sin was ended. There man's sins were rolled away and rolled onto the person of Jesus Christ, so believers might enter God's spiritual inheritance (Col. 1:12-14, 20).

As we said earlier, this was symbolic of cutting away the sins of the world. Their lives should no longer be controlled by the lust of their flesh. Christians should not be pleasing the desires of

their flesh either. We must cut away the worldliness from our hearts. The Spirit must rule over the flesh, to be in right standing with God.

Joshua 5:10 "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho."

A spirit of unity is the soul of victory. The Israelites also celebrated "Passover" before they went into battle, the thanksgiving festival commemorating the Israelites' miraculous redemption for the bondage of Egypt. God wanted them to remember His manifested power in the past as they readied for the challenge of seizing the Promised Land.

They had been instructed of Moses from God to keep the Passover, whenever they entered the Promised Land. The 14th day of Abib (near our April), was Passover. The renewal of their covenant with God required the keeping of the law of God.

Verses 11-12: The ability to adapt to change is a true test of faith. God was altering His stewardship of His people and inaugurating a new means of "fruit of the land", now that they were in the Promised Land. Rather than depending on Him for their daily portion of "manna" (Exodus 16:35), they would learn to trust Him through the natural provision of the land.

Joshua 5:11 "And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched [corn] in the selfsame day."

The corn of the last year, which the inhabitants of those parts had left in their barns. Doubtlessly they fled for fear of the Israelites into their strong cities, or other remoter and safer parts.

"On the morrow after the Passover": I.e. on the sixteenth day. For the Passover was killed between the two evenings of the fourteenth day, and was eaten in that evening or night. Which, according to the Jewish computation, whereby they begin their days at the evening, was a part of the fifteenth day, all which was the feast of the Passover. And so, the morrow of the sixteenth day was the morrow after the Passover, when they were obliged to offer unto God the first sheaf, and then were allowed to eat of the rest.

"Parched corn": Of that year's corn, which was most proper and customary for that use.

"In the selfsame day; having an eager desire to enjoy the fruits of the land."

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began at Passover. It appears this was kept as well.

Joshua 5:12 "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."

The “manna”, which had been given first some 40 years before (Exodus 16:15), and had been designed to sustain a humble and grateful people (Deut. 8:1-3), now “ceased”.

God had begun to provide this food from the time of (Exodus chapter 16), and did so for 40 years (Exodus 16:35). Since food was plentiful in the Land of Canaan, they could provide for themselves with produce such as dates, barley and olives.

The heavenly Bread (manna), had fed them during their wilderness wanderings, when there was nothing else to eat. Now they are in the land full of food. They will eat of the good of the land. The manna did not cease, until they had passed over into their Promised Land. The miracle of the manna was made even more real by its stopping, just after they arrived in the land of plenty food.

Verses 13-15: Joshua’s “worship” of the “captain of the host of the Lord” and the instructions (of verse 15; compare Exodus 3:5), show clearly that “Joshua” stood before the divine presence (compare Exodus 33:14). Many believe that the divine captain with “sword drawn” was none other than Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate appearance. If so, it may anticipate a later appearance of our Lord at the head of the heavenly armies, out of whose mouth “goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15). Joshua fittingly was reverent in worship. The captain, sword drawn, showed a posture indicating He was set to give Israel victory over the Canaanites (6:2; compare 1:3). For the drawn sword (see the note at 1 Chron. 21:16; compare Gen. 3:24 and Num. 22:23).

Joshua 5:13 "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, [Art] thou for us, or for our adversaries?"

The Lord reveals His presence in a person’s life as the direct result of personal obedience to Him. Rather than running away when he saw “a man” in his path “with his sword drawn” (Num. 22:23, 31; 1 Chron. 21:16), Joshua confronted Him. Joshua had courage because he knew he was in the will of God, and in that place, there is no need to fear anyone or anything.

This was a vision, or an appearance of an angelic being in the form of a man. The sword drawn speaks of war. Joshua asks him, who this is speaking of, them or their enemy? Joshua knew this was a supernatural happening, or he would not have walked up to a man with a drawn sword.

Verses 14-15: The Man’s reply to Joshua’s question indicated that He did not choose sides; rather, He commanded the “host” of heaven, and Joshua should report to Him. Christians want to marshal God’s allegiance for their cause, when they should simply submit and follow wherever He leads. Once Joshua understood this, he fell “on his face” in worship.

Joshua 5:14 "And he said, Nay; but [as] captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?"

Not for or on the side of their adversaries was he come, as Joshua suspected at the first sight of him. The Septuagint version is, "he said unto him", taking that as it is.

"But as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come": Of the host of the Lord both in heaven and in earth, angels and men. And particularly of the people of Israel, called the armies and host of the Lord (Exodus 7:4). So that though Joshua was general, Christ was commander. And so Joshua understood him, and therefore showed a readiness to do whatsoever he should command him. The spiritual Israel of God, the church, is in a militant state, and has many enemies to combat with, sin, Satan, the world, and false teachers. Christ is their Leader and Commander. The Captain of their salvation, and has all necessary qualifications or wisdom, courage, and might, for such an office (see Isaiah 55:4).

"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth": In reverence of this divine and illustrious Person, whom he perceived to be what he was.

He is not for the adversaries. He has come to lead that vast army of God against the enemies of Israel. Joshua, recognizing the fact that he is the captain of the host of the LORD, fell on his face to worship God. It would be correct for Joshua to worship Him, if this is the manifestation of the One we call Jesus. The Lord does appear to lead a mighty army in Revelation. Joshua calls Him his Lord. It is either the Lord Himself, or an angel He has sent for this task.

Joshua 5:15 "And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy. And Joshua did so."

As a trial and proof of his obedience to him.

"Loose thy shoe from off thy foot": Which is to be understood literally, as when the like was commanded Moses at Horeb (Exodus 3:5).

"For the place whereon thou standest is holy": Because of the presence of this Person, and as long as he was there, though afterwards was as another place.

"And Joshua did so": Loosed his shoe from his foot, in obedience to the Captain of the Lord's host. Thereby giving proof of his willingness, and cheerful readiness to serve under him. And did worship. Gave him religious worship and adoration, which had he been a created angel he would not have given to him, nor would such a one have received it (Rev. 19:10).

This is the same thing the voice from the burning bush had said to Moses. Any place the presence of the Lord is, is holy ground.

Exodus 3:5 "And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy ground."

Joshua is aware of the presence of the Lord here. He removes his shoes.

Joshua Chapter 5 Questions

1. What had the kings of the Amorites and Canaanites heard that frightened them?
2. How was their fear described?
3. Who had earlier spoken the truth about these kings?
4. Who are they terrified of?
5. Why was Joshua to make him sharp knives?
6. Who will this be done to?
7. What does this symbolize?
8. What did they name the place where this happened?
9. Why was this necessary?
10. The circumcising of the men was a symbol of their _____ with God.
11. Why were all the men of war allowed to die in the wilderness?
12. Who would be circumcised?
13. The _____ must rule over the _____, to be in right standing with God.
14. What day did they keep the Passover?
15. The renewal of their covenant with God required the keeping of the _____ of God.
16. Verse 11 speaks of what feast being kept?
17. When did the manna cease?
18. How was the miracle of the manna made even more real?
19. What did Joshua see in verse 13?
20. What was this?
21. How do we know Joshua knew this was supernatural?
22. Who did He call Himself?

23. What did Joshua do, when He said who He was?
24. What had He come to do?
25. Who does the author believe this is a manifestation of?
26. What did He tell Joshua to do?
27. Why was he to do it?
28. When was this same thing said before?