

Joshua 5

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Date: 31 July 2022

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[0 : 0 0] that's Joshua 5. Please stand as you're able for the reading of God's word. As soon as all the kings of the Amorites, who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites, who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel. At that time, the Lord said to Joshua, make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time. So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-Heh-Eraloth. And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them.

All the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. For the people of Israel walked 40 years in the wilderness until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not obey the voice of the Lord. The Lord swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 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. When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. And the Lord said to Joshua, today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the 14th day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land, and there was no longer manna for the people of Israel.

But they ate of the fruit of the land of Cain in that year. When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, Are you for us or for our adversaries? And he said, No, but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, What does my Lord say to his servant? And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy. And Joshua did so. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

[3 : 0 5] Father, we say with the psalmist, our soul waits for the Lord. He is our help and our shield.

For our heart is glad in him because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us. And Father, as we quiet our hearts, as we still our hearts, with the promise of your word ring true, that as we're still, that in these moments we would come to know God, to know that you our Lord. And help us to descend, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

How does one prepare for battle? What is necessary to ensure victory? What must be accomplished so that lives are preserved, the good guys win, and the outcome is favorable? It would make sense, certainly, for artillery and armories to be well stocked, for soldiers to be thoroughly disciplined and trained, for reconnaissance to be conducted, strategies shared, history studied, tactics discussed, and a plan implemented.

This is how nation states in our day prepare for modern warfare. It's proven, or this is what has been proven to be effective. Yet when we come to Joshua chapter 5, this is not how God will prepare his people for battle. Granted, they have conducted reconnaissance in chapter 2, but unusually, it's not under God's direction. Joshua commenced it. And little has been spoken up to this point about preparing for battle. Rather, the question Joshua, the book, is concerned about is

not whether or not you can fight. That's not the question. The question is, can you follow? Can you follow? Far more than strength or strategy? God wants to know if his people are listening and obedient. When God speaks, will his people listen? When God instructs, will his people obey? What God says will his people actually do? The chapters leading up to chapter 5 have this pattern. You see it all over chapters 3 and 4.

The Lord speaks and the people comply and obey. The Lord speaks and people obediently respond.

[6 : 19] And we'll find the same here in chapter 5. And this is the principle that is at work for us this morning. We are most prepared for battle when we give ourselves to obedience. In other words, here's the line.

Here's, I'll tag it this way. Obedience is our objective. Obedience is our objective. Trust and obey. There is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. As much as preparing for all these external facets, preparing for battle are essential, we will find this morning that God desires the heart of his people to be ready and to be devoted to him in obedience. For if God has this, then you are equipped for all of life. Let me restate that. If God has this, you are prepared for all of life. It's as God is saying, you will be equipped for all of life. Every hardship, every trial, every obstacle. If I have this, then you're good. We are most prepared for life when we give our hearts to obedience. obedience. We see this, right? Obedience to driving laws protects lives. Obedience to civil law maintains civil order or uphold society. We obey scientific laws because we have to. We design, engineer things according to these laws that uphold the created order. They're not strange suggestions but understood necessities. Laws exist for this reason. Therefore, obedience to God's laws actually upholds God's people.

Adherence to God's word imparts the life that God so desires. This morning, I want to navigate our text in three parts. There seem to be three clear breaks here.

The text gives us three scenes. In the first scene, we see an act of circumcision. In the second, an act of celebration. And the third, a picture of revelation. So here it is, circumcision, celebration, revelation.

[9 : 06] Circumcision, focused on verses two through nine. Verse one of chapter five arguably goes with the end of chapter four. You can imagine the entire nation has crossed the river, not by bridge, nor by boat, but by foot. Word has gotten out that God has dammed up the Jordan River, forging a path on the riverbed where the nation could cross.

He had done the same in the glorious exodus out of Egypt, and now he does the same in the grand entrance into Canaan. Certainly, these reiterate that God is at work. According to verse 24 of chapter four, God is at work.

So that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is mighty, and that his people, Israel, may fear the Lord forever. Verse one tells us more of chapter five.

The kings in the land, the kings of the Canaanites and the Amorites, the hearts of the kings are melting. Their spirits are depleted. Their courage is melting like candle wax.

Their zeal and their confidence were quickly fading away. Why? Because the people of Israel had shown up. Their reputation preceded their arrival.

[10 : 41] We saw it in chapter two, when the spies were commissioned into Jericho. Rahab, the prostitute, receives these spies and mentions that the city is filled with fear, and the inhabitants, their hearts are melting away.

They heard of a 40-year miracle in a land far, far away, of a deliverance of a people by the hands of a mighty God at the expense of the Egyptians.

The Lord had kept them in the desert for 40 years, and here they are at your gates.

What the mighty act of deliverance into the Exodus was now a mighty act of entrance. The land was rightfully terrified because Israel had shown up.

And you see that in the next chapter. Verse one, Jericho, Jericho was shut up. All the gates were barred close, inside and outside.

[11 : 54] None out, none came in. Because the hearts of the kings were melting. See, you and I, at the end of chapter four, we're ready for battle.

Let's go. Here we go. The river parted. We're in the land. I don't know what weapons they got, but let's just go. If he could part this river, he could do whatever.

And I'm here to watch it. Yet, we're given verses two to 15 that are quite unusual. Because in the verse two, you will find the first mention of anything that appears to be a weapon. You see it there in verse two of chapter five. At that time, the Lord said to Joshua, make flint knives. Oh, here we go. Let's stock the artillery. Stock the armory. Only to find that these knives are not to inflict harm on an enemy, but they are incision tools to be used upon themselves.

[13:10] The second act, after 12 memorial stones had been constructed last week, as they now sit in the promised land, the second act that they are to do was to circumcise all the men.

Genesis 17 is its origin. It's a sign of a covenantal agreement. It's a contract between Abraham's descendants and the Lord.

The incision on the men would be a mark of identity, that they belong to God. They were the people of God. There was an everlasting commitment upon them from God.

It indicated God's promise to them that they would be abundantly fruitful. A multitude of nations would emerge out of them. They would inherit a land as an everlasting possession.

God would be their God, and they would be his people. And from the narrative, we discover, it appears that since the Exodus, Israel no longer performed the ritual.

[14:20] They no longer upheld the covenant sign. While they wandered in the wilderness, they were not only disobedient to the Lord, but they neglected the very sign that God had given them to indicate that they were his people.

Therefore, our text tells us that the boys born during the wanderings were uncircumcised. It was these that Joshua circumcised in verse 7.

Why? Because obedience is the objective. The act was certainly painful. And if you allow, well, my mind has wandered all sorts of places, and you're probably wondering, like, how did this happen? Did they line up? Did they do it themselves? Who, what, when? Yeah, the text doesn't give us those details, and probably for good reason.

But the text wants you to know this, verse 8. That all of them, the whole nation, was circumcised.

[15:25] All the men. And as a result, God speaks, Today I roll away the reproach of Egypt from you. For the past 40 years, the reproach of Egypt sat on Israel, marked them.

It was a stain on the nation after the Exodus from Egypt. It was a thorn in their side, a wound that never healed and was infected. It was the broken bone never resetting.

What is it? Well, it has to do with Egypt, because the author has mentioned it repeatedly. Now, there's a cloud over this generation that wandered in the wilderness.

And what did it mean? It seems to carry two facets. The reproach of Egypt encapsulated the ridicule the Egyptians had on Israel as they wandered the desert.

The Old Testament gives us glimpses of this. Various places in the Pentateuch. That when God was so fed up with his people, he goes to Moses and he says, Let's just get rid of them all.

[16:35] Let's start anew. Start fresh. We'll start from you, Moses, and come up with a better nation. And Moses goes, No, no, no, no. God, no, no, no, no. Don't do that.

Don't do that. And his argument is interesting. He says, Lord, don't do that. Why? Because when all the nations hear that God was so mighty to bring his people out, and his people were so rebellious that he got fed up and just obliterated them in the wilderness, they will laugh and mock and will say, God was strong to bring them out, but God wasn't strong enough to keep them alive.

And it went something along those lines. That was the ridicule possibly coming from Egypt, the reproach that they would have heard.

But it also likely carries the aftermath of the nation. That after they had left Egypt, there was great promise. Instead, the nation is marked by her disobedience, her violations, her failure to uphold the covenant obligations.

And it seems like here, God is not only removing the reproach, but extending a covenant renewal by starting afresh with a new people.

[18:00] See, circumcision was a covenant sign. And here, it's a second chance given to undeserving people. It's a new start for those who had stumbled out of the gates.

It's here that we see the prospects of second chances for God's people. When we fail and when we misstep and we are a repeated inability to follow God well, it's not met by God's dismissal, but it is met by God's patient accompaniment.

That when we come to our senses, he is committed to creating a people for himself out of us. Amen. Because if you admit it, I probably, oh, I'll admit it.

I shouldn't have been the first pick. I wouldn't have gone in the first round. I don't even think I would have made the draft. I would have been on waiver somewhere.

And yet the Lord here does not dismiss it to his people, but committed of making a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people of his own possession.

[19 : 20] And so the guilt and the shame of Egypt and all that hung over God's people, he says, let's roll it out, roll it away, seemingly burying it in the sand.

His patient endurance with his people is to produce our obedience, our objective. And so the people have this renewed, a fresh commitment to the Lord.

It wasn't a military strategy at all. Israel crippled herself. Her entire standing army incapacitated her military.

Yet the writer wants you and I to know that before the raising of any weapons, there had to be a renewal of vows, a removal of reproach, circumcision.

And it's followed by celebration. It's followed by a celebration. There you see it in verses 10 through 12. It would seem that while the men are healing and camped at Gilgal, they took occasion to celebrate the Passover.

[20 : 32] Four days have transpired since they crossed the Jordan. And they are now celebrating, even commemorating Passover. There is immense significance to Passover.

It commemorated their deliverance. It was the last meal before the great Exodus. And now it would be the first meal as they entered a new land. It was emblematic for God had spared the firstborns of Israel.

And now here it would demarcate a new start, a new beginning, a new Israel. It is all the more staggering in that the last Passover recorded is actually in Numbers chapter nine.

It was, it was held the second year of the wilderness wanderings. In other words, the Bible authors have been silent about Passover festivities in the wilderness for something like 39 years.

certainly indicted Israel for their failure to keep it. As they wandered, they not only neglected the sign that made them God's people, but they abandoned the ceremonial celebration that reminded them that they were God's people.

[21 : 50] When it was instituted, Passover was to be a memorial day. Moses writes in Exodus, you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations, a statute forever.

You shall keep it as a feast. And yet, it stopped until I got here. And see, what is taking place in Gilgal between the circumcision and the celebration is the end of the wilderness experience.

The first Passover commenced the founding of a new people. This Passover marked the giving of the land. Passover would not only carry the significance of protection when God's angel passed over Israel's firstborn, but here the writer puts an emphasis on what they ate in the new land.

Three times, the writer needs you to know that they ate. Once in verse 11 and twice in verse 12. To the writer, what is important is that Israel for the first time in 40 years did not eat manna or quail. Regularly, each day, I think my children ask, what are we eating? What are we eating? If you grew up in the wilderness, you knew exactly what you were eating.

[23 : 18] You knew what was available for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And yet here, the writer wants us to know that for the first time, they were eating something different.

God's provision would no longer be the daily supply of manna, but it would come from the land flowing with milk and honey. It would be as the new Garden of Eden, a place where they would eat off the land and its produce.

All that the land produced would be their food. It was a picture of abundant provision, lavish and plentiful in supply. God's people would never lack God's supply as promised in the land of Canaan, for the land would supply all of her food.

And details are left out here, but you can imagine tasting new food for the first time. What is this? Unleavened cakes. Possibly like a biscuit or a cracker. What is this?

Parched grain? Maybe like an Israeli couscous. Where is the manna? It ceased. It stopped. It's no longer what we have because we're no longer a wilderness people.

[24 : 37] Manna was for the desert. Cake and grain are for the promised land. And certainly there's reason to celebrate for this new cuisine. There was more reason to celebrate as people commemorated their deliverance from Egypt and their commencement into Canaan.

You see, the chapter of the wilderness wanderings, this chapter or this record of the wilderness wanderings of the defiant nation closes here.

They were once an unmarked people. now circumcised, belonging to God. There were once a wandering people.

No home, no place, no statehood. But here they are eating new food in a new place. the wilderness generation had failed in both keeping circumcision and celebrating Passover.

That was all corrected in Gilgal. Why? Because obedience is the objective. The people of God are obedient to God.

[25 : 51] That is our aim. Israel is seen as a new people here with a changed status in a new place. grace. And most importantly, with a new heart.

One that is obedient. Their entry into the land is now fully established, ritually speaking. They are now a prepared people. They have set up 12 memorial stones as recorded in the last chapter upon their entrance.

They have now performed circumcision, clearly identifying that they belong to God. they have celebrated Passover, commemorating his deliverance and his now provision in Canaan.

They are an obedient people ready for God's purposes. And this is it. Because God cannot make much of himself with a disobedient people.

God will not make much of himself through me if I'm defiant, rebellious.

[27 : 08] You may desire to go fight Jericho. But before Jericho, you better fight this. Jericho will fall.

But it comes through obedience. And it will not come through zeal, passion, fervor, might, ambition. And here is the operative principle for the people of God. He could take the weakest people, the most handicapped people, the most foolish people, the most enable people.

Yet if they are obedient, he will tear down Jericho's, slay Goliath's, cross seas. Obedience is the objective.

Circumcision celebration, and it closes with revelation. Revelation, these last few verses, verses 13, 14, and 15.

[28 : 18] It's like a great action movie. There's immense tension that has been left in the narrative. Jericho is right there. We had spent spies to Jericho.

There's Rahab. There's kings whose hearts are melting. There's people whose spirits are waning. There's a city that's completely fortified, and we're waiting for the first fight scene.

Shoot the arrow. Let it go. When's the first punch? Yet there's one final episode before we get to chapter six.

It's an encounter that Joshua has. We're not told precisely when it occurred, whether during Passover or shortly thereafter, but Joshua finds himself away from Gilgal, and now outside Jericho. Forty years have, more than forty years have passed since this young man had scouted out the land with Caleb. And I think imaginatively and maybe creatively, but I wonder if he was there.

[29 : 27] As he says right there, he was by Jericho staring at the massive walls. Nomadic Israel probably hadn't encountered many fortified cities in the desert.

Jericho may have been the first. I wonder if Joshua was in there, what's the plan? Do I scale that wall? Do I lay a siege to the city and just surround it and wait for its supplies to run out?

We're unsure, but as he's probably likely thinking about the battle, he's met by a man with a sword.

You see it there, a drawn sword. And it's a bold encounter because here you have, I would run fear because that's my MO, but Joshua goes to this man and he says to him, you for us or for our adversaries?

which side are you on? The response is noteworthy. The man responds, no, neither.

[30 : 51] I'm the commander of the army of the Lord and I have come. Now, is he saying that he's the commander of Israel, the army of Israel?

Possibly. Is he the commander of a whole different army that no one sees, namely an angelic heavenly army? Possibly. It's unclear, but what follows is very clear.

Because Joshua is subservient to this figure for his face falls down in worship. For Joshua, the only response here is prostration and worship. And here, the commander instructs Joshua to remove his sandals from his feet, for where he stands is holy.

It's reminiscent of that encounter that Moses had with a burning bush. Joshua complies or taking the language I've chosen to use, Joshua obeys. Why? Because obedience is the objective.

And this third episode is fascinating because it affirms that God is with Joshua, or might not affirm it. But it says, Joshua, are you with me, really?

[32 : 03] And here it is. I have now come. You see it? I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.

It's like the Avengers showed up all of a sudden. Iron Man, Hulk, Spider-Man. Yeah, now I'm ready. Let's go. Who's the enemy?

Is the figure a pre-incarnate Christ? A Christophany? I don't know. Is it an angelic figure? I don't know. But I do know this. When the burning bush showed up and told Moses to take off his sandals, it was God.

It's certainly divine revelation that the burning bush spoke in this way. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

Take off your shoes. And here it is. Divine presence revealed.

[33 : 03] Revelation reinforcing that God is here. God was present. Why? Because anything that's holy is holy because God is there.

And the whole chapter reinforces that God would show up. Chapter 5 would show up for his people. He's protected them. Not only out of Egypt, in the Passover, in the wilderness, he has provided for them in the Passover, in the abundant land with food.

He's present with them. Verses 13 to 15 as this warrior figure. God is with his people and God would work through his people. And this episode, in this chapter, gives us something to embed and impress upon our hearts before I wind down.

We take this home for God, for us, for me, for you. It is important to note that God wanted Joshua to worship before he went to war.

It is noteworthy and applicable to you and I. That before you go to any war, you better worship.

[34 : 29] For Israel, they would go to war. But before war comes worship. It is to say that your eyes, Joshua, are on Jericho.

But I need your eyes, Joshua, to move from Jericho and look at Jesus. Because when your eyes are on Jesus, Jericho's walls become pretty small.

When your eyes are upon Jesus, Jericho's army looks very insignificant. Because when your eyes are on Jesus, you all circumstances are belittled.

Behold, God, is what this final segment is shouting. Worship prepares you for war.

And this is the secret to all of our troubling circumstances. Fledgling marriages, unraveling friendships, unbearable loss, overwhelming darkness. Bing, you don't know.

[35 : 46] I have to go home to this. I don't know what's at home. But I do know this. Before you go to war, you better worship.

Bing, I'm exhausted, overly fatigued, past the breaking point. I might get a little bit of that.

and you have to walk into this after this service. That's your Jericho. And I tell you, look at Jesus.

Oh, Bing, my days are so dark. It's always cloudy over my heart. The sunshine is always covered.

My joy is always fleeting. my gloom is always abundance. That's my war, and I may not understand. But what I can tell you is before you go into war, you better find a way to worship.

[36 : 55] Do you see how big he is? Do you see him? Do you see how mighty he is? Do you sense his compassion toward you?

Have you tasted his mercy for you? Chapter five, as I close, supplies the tactical handbook for Christian warfare.

You're going to war? Make sure you take care of these. and we are well aware of the warfare metaphor in the Christian life.

We struggle not against flesh or blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against powers, against over this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil. Certainly our struggles are embodied by people, circumstances, suffering, anguish, loss, hurt, pain, brokenness.

These are our battles. These are our Jerichos. And what is the takedown strategy? And the preparation as you march toward Jericho? Worship.

[38 : 07] Worship. The whole chapter is really worship. Circumcision is an act of worship. Worship and obedience. Celebrating Passover is worship.

Obedient worship. Submission and prostration to God's revelation is worship. Obedience is the objective because obedience pleases God.

Obedience is really worship. And it continues for us today because God has given us signs. I know you're like circumcision? I'm not sure that still holds. In the New Testament there's a new sign thankfully.

It's called baptism. In the Old Testament circumcision identified God's people. The New Testament baptism. Baptism identifies God's people.

It is now the covenant sign identifying us with Christ. As Passover was the commemorative meal for those who came out of the Exodus, we have been given another meal.

[39 : 16] A Passover of sorts instituted by the Lord Jesus on the night that he was betrayed. the whole meal has a language of commemoration.

The church that I grew up in had this giant table. I always said it was grammatically! It was correct. It said this do in remembrance of me.

It shouldn't read like do this in remembrance of me. But there it was. Why? Because the meal is a commemoration, a celebration. And it continues for us today.

Signs, a covenant sign, a covenant meal, and you're going to say, well, I've never had an encounter with a commander of the army of the Lord.

Well, you have action. We call him faithful and true. And at the end of your Bibles, he's riding mounted on a white horse, making war, crowned with many crowns, as we have sung.

[40 : 28] And behind him follow the armies of heaven. He is the commander-in-chief. We call him the word of God. He is called the son of God.

And he's been named Jesus, the very image of God. And he is entering battle in Revelation 19. And the enemy are all those who have failed to worship him.

And when it's all said and done, he goes to battle on behalf of God's people in the scriptures.

The weapon was a cross. The reproach were Satan's taunts. the ridicule of the bystanders, the onlookers.

If you are the son of God, why don't you come down from here? We'll believe in you. The apparent result was a corpse in the tomb.

[41 : 33] But the final conclusion of that battle, you know. it was an empty grave, a resurrected body, a victorious ascension, the eternal glorification.

And do you see him? Do you see him? Have you beheld him? Have your eyes fastened upon the Lord Jesus, standing, victorious, vanquishing all of your enemies, sin, death, the devil, slain.

And as a result, Joshua fell on his face and worshipped. and if you behold him, it reads like this, and Christ's church, and Christ's church fell on their faces and worshipped.

Obedience are objective. Worship prepares you for war. Christ has vanquished all of your foes.

Father, we come to you and our hearts are stirred or my heart is stirred that we know next week, Jericho falls.

[43 : 19] But we see this week before Jericho falls, our hearts must be set aright. Obedience is our objective.

And so for all of our waywardness, would you discipline us? For all of our misgivings, would you extend mercy to draw us for all of our disobedience where we repent and be met with forgiveness.

May we be those who attest with a visible sign that I belong to the Lord Jesus.

That our meals are marked certainly monthly, if not weekly, certainly daily, marked with this commemorative aspect that the Lord rescued us.

And may we be those who behold the commander of the army of the Lord that fights for his people.

[44 : 40] Help us, O Lord, that as we sing and as we worship you together, would our hearts rise up with gratitude.

We ask these things for your name's sake. Amen.