

“Gilgal, Taking Away the Reproach”

Joshua 3-5:9

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“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.

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

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

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.

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.

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 shew them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey.

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.

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.

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.

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.” (Joshua 5:1-10 AV)

Before we take up the passage before us in Joshua 5:1-10, I want to set the table by a brief summary of the events that had brought them to this place. According to the Bible Dictionaries, there may be three places called “Gilgal” in the Scriptures. This is the one before Jericho.

I. The crossing of Jordan. After the spies returned several days passed as preparation was made for crossing the Jordan River.

a. Jordan means “descending” and from its headwaters from Mt. Herman, Jordan rushes downward in a torrent to the Dead Sea. There were fords that would have made the crossing simple, but this was the rainy and flood season and Jordan overflowed its banks and passage was well-nigh impossible in those days.

b. God gave very specific instructions for this crossing.

i. The priests were to go before, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, the waters would pile into a heap. The priests would stand in the midst of the river with the Ark of the Covenant until all of the people had passed over.

ii. The people were to follow 2000 cubits or about ½ mile behind the ark, for it was to be sanctified in their minds and they were not to approach it or count is as common.

iii. Purpose: To let them know that there is a living God among them: 3:10 To magnify Joshua in the eyes of the people. The events of this day would elevate Joshua in the minds of the people in the same way that Moses had been exalted.

c. The conquest of Canaan was going to be the reality of God’s decree, not the imposition of the dream of the Joshua or the nation of Israel.

i. Trust in the Lord, wait patiently for Him. Psalms 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

ii. Our inheritance comes in God’s reality; not in a reality that we seek to impose. Israel prospered when they waited on the Lord; they suffered when they ran in their own wisdom, like at Ai and the incident of the Gibeonites.

II. The erection of the Stones of Memorial. Chapter four.

a. Twelve men had been chosen to pick up each a stone out of the midst of Jordan, where the priests with the Ark stood, and carry these rocks out of the river to make a memorial. They must have been stout men who were chosen for this task for they carried the rocks upon their shoulders.

b. The purpose: verse 4-6

i. To serve as a reminder to the future generations of the things that God had done for His people.

ii. History is important for the people of God.

c. A godless generation has no concern about history. They think it began when they were born. Nobody knew anything until they came along.

d. The Fifth Commandment requires us to know our history and to understand the roots that made us who we are. That will mean not only looking at the successes of our ancestors, but their failures, because we not only are shaped by the things they did that are right, but by the things that they did that were wrong. We must honor them by accepting this and not reducing them to irrelevance.

III. Gilgal: the renewal of circumcision.

a. Circumcision had not been practiced since the unbelief that led to them despising the original twelve spies and refusing to go into the land. For forty years they wandered in the wilderness, until that entire generation had died. Of those over twenty years of age all had fallen except Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies.

b. The ceasing of circumcision must have been a chastening of Israel, for God removed

the sign of the covenant from all the children that were born in the wilderness during those forty years. It was more than neglect and more than practicality, but must have come as a discipline to them. You remember that the LORD sought to slay Moses when he had neglected to circumcise his sons because of the opposition of his wife. So this failure to circumcise must have come by the will of God.

c. You see how you must observe the times. Even renewal and restoration comes in God's time and cannot be imposed according to your will. Just as God refused to let them enter Canaan for forty years, so He removed his covenant sign from them. Circumcision was a sign of faith, and it was not renewed until faith was renewed. True renewal comes according to the will of God and according to the times and places that He has appointed.

d. The meaning of circumcision:

i. The promised seed would come, for in the seed of Abraham all the world would be blessed. Circumcision was the sign and seal of God that the redeemer would come and remove all uncleanness from the people of God.

ii. The one who comes would baptize with the Holy Ghost, for the blessing would come not come through the flesh, but through the promise of God. The seed of the flesh is rejected, but the promise would come through the seed of promise. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

iii. Israel would inherit the land of Canaan, also as a promise of the eternal inheritance of the people of God. The land would spew out the unclean as God had said. Israel must therefore purify herself and cut off everything that defiled.

iv. Although the covenant is eternal and cannot be abrogated, yet it is fitting that the earthly people of God from time to time renew the covenant that God made in Jesus Christ, by reaffirming faith and reaffirming their commitment to the promises of God, especially after times of apostasy and defeat.

IV. Application:

a. The integrity of the promises lies in God and not in man. Even though forty years had gone by without circumcision in Israel, yet the sacrifices were offered and God still led His people with the pillar of fire and cloud. The ministry was still among them, for they had Moses. The government of God was among them in the elders. Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant, but not the covenant itself. The covenant to Abraham was in Christ and given by promise, according to Galatians, and circumcision was the sign of Abraham's faith in the promise, and nothing in Moses could disannul that promise. Do we presume that the Passover was not observed for those forty years? Was the Day of Atonement observed each year?

b. The importance of circumcision must neither be underrated nor overrated. Even though the outward sign was taken away for a time, yet the promises of God were good to those who believed, for the promise was always in terms of faith. The reality must never be sacrificed for the appearance. For instance, public prayers are to be made, yet those that are offered in private are much more important. We are not to pray to be seen of men.

c. God has no pleasure in ceremonies as ceremonies. The kingdom of God is not in displays of devotion, but in the spirit and in truth. This is the reason that Paul said,
"12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” (Galatians 6:12-17 AV)

Let the Jew glory in the scars of his circumcision; Paul bore the marks of the cross of Christ, which were far greater than the mark of circumcision.

d. We will inherit our kingdom only if we experience the reality of the circumcision of the heart. What Israel did in sign, we must experience in reality.

i. Even the occupation of Canaan was not the true rest of God, as Hebrews says. Joshua did not give them that true rest, but just an ensample, or type, of the true Sabbath of God, which is peace in the heart and trust in God.

ii. Paul said that the Greeks sought after wisdom, and the Jews seek after a sign, but that the power of the Gospel is Christ crucified, foolishness to the Greeks, and a stumblingblock to the Jews.

1. The power of the gospel is not in clever arguments and apologetics using philosophy and imaginations, but in Christ crucified.

2. The power of the gospel is not in miracles and signs and wonders, but in Christ crucified.

iii. Our circumcision is the “putting off of the body of sins by the circumcision of Christ” is the way Paul puts it in Colossians 2. or as Paul puts it in Romans 8: 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

iv. This is the new covenant, written not on tables of stone, but on the tables of the heart. God has done a much greater thing for us than He did for Israel in the book of Joshua. It is far easier to overcome great walled cities and giants and mighty war chariots than it is to subdue our own hearts:

1. We have great giants in our hearts; giants of pride and self-will and sinful lusts and desires. Who can subdue these: Paul says, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

2. We have great walled cities in our hearts. How are defenses set against God and His truth. We have it all worked out. Even churches can be aiders and abettors and part of the fortification of our hearts against the truth. We pick our friends among those who will help us defend our hearts against the truth. We marshal our arguments and set our defenders in array against the Spirit of God. We find friends and relatives that support us and praise us even in those things in which we are in opposition against the truth. This is the reason that the prophet said, “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to

seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.” (Hosea 10:12 AV) This is to mix the metaphors, but the meaning is the same. The hard heart is heavily fortified against the truth; it does not want to leave its comfort zone where it is nursed and petted and made to feel good about itself. But the walls must come down; the hard soil must be broken up so that the seed can take root and begin to grow. This is the Lord’s work.

3. We have great war machines to send against those who would tell us the truth. It is far easier to contend with chariots and other instruments of war than the machines that are sent against those who tell us the truth. It is no concern to us that we do not love the Lord, but we are terribly alarmed lest someone discover that we do not love the Lord.

v. What are we to do? We must do two things:

1. Forsake our own imaginations and our own wisdom. “ He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat. 26 He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.” (Proverbs 28:25-26 AV) Ten of the first spies look at the great walled cities and the giants and their wisdom told them that the conquest couldn’t be done. The congregation believed these unbelieving spies and did not inherit the land. And neither will we if we trust in the arm of man and the wisdom of the flesh.

2. Commit ourselves to Jesus Christ and his righteousness. Jesus put it this way: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33 AV)

3. This is a good prayer: “Dear Lord Jesus, I know for certain that you died on the cross for sinners like me. I need forgiveness of sins and a new heart, a heart that loves you and loves the people of God. I renounce my own ways and my own thoughts and want to walk in your ways in your thoughts. Although I have often been hard and cold in my heart and have not loved you nor your people as I ought, yet I know that is my sin and I do renounce it. Renew a right spirit within me. You have said that you will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask, and I ask you, O Lord Jesus, that the fruit of the Spirit may be manifest in my life to the glory of God and the work of your kingdom. Amen and Amen.”

Additional notes.

1. The pillar of cloud was still with Israel even as late as the death of Moses. Deut.31:5

2. God refused to curse Israel in the matter of Balaam, saying He did not see iniquity in Israel—this was after the matter of the twelve spies. Number 23:21.

3. God still gave judgment in Israel as their king, even after the matter of the twelve spies: Numbers 16;

4. God gave them water from the rock and judged Moses for smiting the rock: Numbers 20

5. God said He was with them during all this time, even though their children were not being circumcised: He blessed them during all those forty years: Deut. 2:7.

May God bless you.