

We have crossed over the Jordan!

As we have seen over the last few weeks, the book of Joshua *starts* with crossing over.

Now we have come to the central section of the book of Joshua.

Taking Possession of the land (the last two sections will be “dividing the land” and “worshiping God.”)

God had promised this land to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob –

that their heirs – their descendants – would take possession of the land of Canaan.

And so the leading verb in this section of the book – not surprisingly –

is the verb to take possession!

The opening line of this section highlights the response of the Kings of the Amorites

and the Kings of the Canaanites:

*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.*

We saw last time how the LORD brought Israel through the Jordan River on dry land –

just like he brought Israel across the Red Sea on dry land!

In the Exodus, God parted the waters –

and Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea!

Now, Joshua and his people are baptized in the Jordan River –

consecrated to the work of bringing God’s judgment upon the wicked  
and his salvation to those who believe in him.

Here, the hearts of the kings melt.

They had heard of the crossing of the Red Sea – forty years ago! –

but they probably hoped that the God of Israel had forgotten about his people!

If they listened to the greybeards among them,

they might have heard stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob –

great men who had sojourned among them 400 years before!

But from the standpoint of the ancient world,

they might have thought –

Ah, but their god left them to slavery in Egypt –

so maybe he is dissatisfied with them again!

And they may have taken heart from the great prophet Balaam!

We know from ancient inscriptions in the Jordan River area  
that Balaam was a famous prophet  
whose word was respected all throughout the region.

And sure, he had *blessed* Israel –  
and spoken of how Yahweh would continue to bless them –  
but Balaam had also taught the Moabites and the Midianites  
how to “curse” Israel by leading them astray to worship other gods!

So it is pretty easy to see how, on the one hand, their hearts melted –  
but then, on the other hand, they started scheming  
as to how to resist the Israelite invasion!

Plainly, their melted hearts did not cause them to give up very quickly!  
The opening lines of several chapters show us this:

Take a look at 9:1 – “As soon as all the kings...heard of this,  
they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.”  
Or 10:1 – “As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had captured Ai...  
he feared greatly...” so he said to other kings, “Come help me...”  
Or 11:1 – “When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this...” he gathered the northern alliance!

Melting hearts does not equal lack of resistance!  
Think about how opposition to the gospel looks today?!  
When a person’s heart melts – one of two things will happen:  
either, like Rahab, they will repent and believe the gospel;  
or, like the kings of Canaan, they will harden their melted hearts,  
and fight like hell!

As we saw this morning, there is an appropriate use for the word “hell”!  
And fighting like hell doesn’t just mean fighting hard –  
it means fighting against God!

But the gates of hell will not prevail against the church of our Lord Jesus Christ –  
and so we learn from Joshua – our Lord Jesus –  
how to prepare for battle against the gates of hell!

You prepare for battle by worshiping God.  
And chapter 5 focuses particularly on the importance of the sacraments  
in our training for battle!

We sang Luther’s great baptism hymn last week –  
but this week we are seeing the application of it in the circumcision of Israel  
at the Jordan River.

## 1. The Point of Circumcision

### a) Circumcision and the Wilderness (2-7)

<sup>2</sup> *At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time.”* <sup>3</sup> *So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth.*<sup>[a]</sup>

Some have been puzzled by this phrase –  
“a second time”?

Once you have cut off the foreskin... what is left to cut off?!

But verses 4-7 explain that the wilderness generation had *not been circumcised!*

<sup>4</sup> *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.* <sup>5</sup> *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.*

This has puzzled many.

It appears that the Israelites practiced circumcision while they were in Egypt.

After all, our text says that “all the people who came out [of Egypt] had been circumcised.”

But during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, they somehow stopped doing it!

Some have thought that God forbade them to circumcise –  
but our text doesn't say that.

Our text says (v6):

<sup>6</sup> *For the people of Israel walked forty 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.* <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.*

Was it part of their parents' rebellion?

Or was it God's judgment against them *because* of their rebellion?

It's hard to say.

The best help we get is from Exodus chapter 4,

where we are told that Moses had not circumcised his son while living in Midian.

Turn over to Exodus 4, verses 21-26:

<sup>21</sup> *And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. <sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, <sup>23</sup> and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’”*

<sup>24</sup> *At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. <sup>25</sup> Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' <sup>[c]</sup> feet with it and said, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” <sup>26</sup> So he let him alone. It was then that she said, “A bridegroom of blood,” because of the circumcision.*

Let me re-translate verses 24-26 for you

in a way that probably will communicate what is happening better.

“At a lodging place on the way the LORD met *him* [namely, Moses' firstborn – Gershom] and sought to put him to death.

Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched his “feet” with it and said, ‘Surely you are a blood relative.’

So God let Gershom alone.

It was then that she said “blood relative” because of the circumcision.”

Israel is my son – my firstborn – let my son go that he may serve me.

If you refuse to let him go, behold I will kill your firstborn son.

But then we learn that Moses had not circumcised his own firstborn son!

In Genesis 17, the LORD had told Abraham that the uncircumcised son was cut off from God's people.

Apparently Moses had failed to circumcise Gershom!

Why did Moses not circumcise Gershom?

Quite likely for the same reason that the Israelites did not circumcise their children:  
*because they were in the wilderness!*

Circumcision was a sign of the promise – the blessing of God! –  
but *they* were under a curse.

I'm not saying that either Moses or Israel was *right!*

And the Bible nowhere commends them for failing to circumcise their sons!

Indeed, when Moses fails to circumcise Gershom,

God comes in judgment against him!

(Zipporah acts quickly and rebukes her husband for his failure!)

This is because judgment begins with the household of God.

Moses had been called to deliver Israel from Egypt,  
and he could hardly fill the role if he himself was a covenant-breaker.

This emphasis on the firstborn is poignant in the Passover:  
the whole point of the Passover is that those who do not have the blood  
on the doorposts of their house,  
will lose their firstborn.

In Ex 13:2, as God gives them the regulations for the Passover,  
he tells them to "sanctify to me all the firstborn,  
Whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel,  
both of man and animal; it is Mine."

The firstborn belongs to God.  
The firstborn of clean animals must be sacrificed,  
the firstborn of humans must be redeemed through a sacrifice.

Indeed even our Lord himself, when he was born, had to be redeemed in this fashion.  
In Luke 2:22-24, we are told that 40 days after his birth,  
our Lord was brought to the temple  
and his parents offered the sacrifice to redeem Jesus – their firstborn son.

Although he was the redeemer of all things,  
yet because he took the form of sinful flesh he had to be redeemed.

He did not need to be redeemed from sin –  
that is not the redemption of the firstborn!

Rather, Jesus Christ himself came as the true son of God.  
He was all that Israel was supposed to be.  
And so he relived the whole of Israel's history.  
Hosea spoke of this when he said in Hosea 11:1  
"When Israel was a child, I love him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son."

Matthew takes a text that plainly referred to Israel, "out of Egypt I called my son"  
And says that it is even more true of Jesus.  
Jesus is the true Israel.  
Therefore as the true Israel-as the true firstborn,  
Jesus himself had to receive the redemption of the firstborn,  
in order that he might succeed where Israel had failed.

In Galatians 3-4 Paul portrays the whole history of redemption as a history of the son of God.  
The history of the Old Testament is the history of the son of God in his minority.

Israel was the son of God-the true heir of God;

But so long as he was a child, he was no better than a slave.  
The law was a pedagogue—a servant employed to discipline the children.  
But then in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son,  
born of a woman (the promise of the seed of the woman)  
born under the law so that he might redeem those under the law.  
He is the faithful son—the true Firstborn Son of God,  
who now has redeemed us that we might receive the adoption as sons.

He is the embodiment of Israel—the son of God *par excellence*.  
Jesus is all that Israel was supposed to be.

Therefore, Paul says, all those who are baptized into Christ are sons of God  
through faith in him.

And so you are Abraham's seed – according to the promise.  
You have been adopted among the true sons of God,  
You have been grafted into the true vine.

If Israel was the son of God in his minority,  
Jesus is the Son of God come of age.  
And if you are in Christ,  
then you are also come of age.

All that Israel was supposed to be has come to fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

And we see a picture of that in the circumcision of Israel at Gilgal.  
The circumcision of Israel at Gilgal is a moment of starting over!  
Israel is my son, my firstborn!  
And so now, on the eighth day, Israel – the firstborn Son of God – is circumcised.

If you were here last Sunday night, you may have some bells going off!  
Chapters 2-4 provide a day-by-day sketch of what happens:

The spies spend one night with Rahab,  
where she tells them that the hearts of the people of Jericho have melted with fear.  
Then they spend three days in the hills,  
before reporting to Joshua on the fourth day.  
Then the next day Joshua arose and brought Israel to the banks of the Jordan River.  
But they wait there for three days (fifth, sixth and seventh) before crossing.

On the eighth day.

It really is quite interesting how often this eighth day business pops up!  
Israel enters the land on the eighth day.

Israel passes through the Jordan River on the eighth day!

And then they get circumcised!

Obviously, getting circumcised is a painful thing – especially for an adult male! –  
and so they stay in the camp until they are healed!

(And perhaps the “melted hearts” of the kings of Canaan came in handy here!  
The Israelites were sitting ducks for a few days –  
but the kings of Canaan were in no condition to take action!  
The initiative belongs to the LORD – and to Joshua.)

In verse 9, the LORD explains what all this means:

**b) The Reproach of Egypt (8-9)**

*<sup>8</sup> When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. <sup>9</sup> 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<sup>[b]</sup> to this day.*

The reproach of Egypt –  
the “taint” of Egypt –  
was rolled away.

And so the place is called “Gilgal” – rolled away – to this day.

The story of Gilgal is all about a new beginning – a fresh start!  
The reproach of Egypt is rolled away!  
Israel, the firstborn son of God, is starting a new chapter!  
Will this generation succeed where their fathers failed?  
Will the nations be blessed through Abraham’s seed?!

Gilgal is the first encampment of Israel in the Promised Land.  
All through the book of Joshua, there are references to the “camp at Gilgal” –  
where the army returns after every engagement.  
It remains one of the three centers of Samuel’s ministry (with Bethel and Mizpah),  
and when King Saul became king, he was crowned at Gilgal.

But at Gilgal, Saul rebelled against the LORD and disobeyed...  
At Gilgal, Saul offered sacrifices without waiting for Samuel.  
And Saul brought King Agag (the ancestor of Haman) to Gilgal –  
and kept the best of the plunder to bring to Gilgal for worship!

This is why the LORD will say through the prophet Hosea:  
“Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them.” (Hos 9:15)

Gilgal – the place of new beginnings – the place of second chances –  
Fails.

And so in the book of Kings,  
the prophet Elijah will go from Bethel (where Jeroboam's golden calf was),  
down to Jericho,  
back up the Jordan to Gilgal –  
before crossing over the Jordan and going back out into the wilderness.

As we'll see in the coming weeks,  
Elijah is retracing the steps of the Conquest.

When Israel took possession of the land –  
they started at Gilgal,  
they conquered Jericho,  
and then they took Bethel.

Elijah walks that back!  
He goes from Bethel to Jericho to Gilgal –  
and then crosses the Jordan River on dry ground!  
leaving the Promised Land the same way that Joshua entered!

As the book of Kings portrays it –  
the Spirit of the LORD is going back out the way he came in!  
The presence of God will no longer be with Israel!

“Starting over” isn't enough!

Have you ever tried to “start over”?  
Maybe you had a friendship spectacularly implode!  
Maybe your marriage was on the rocks.

How do you start over?  
There are so many memories!  
So many hurts.  
He'll just do it again!  
Every time she uses that tone of voice...I just remember...

It's not enough to “start over”!  
We need a new heart!  
I quote the shorter catechism on repentance a lot –  
but probably not enough...



“Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin,  
and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,  
does with grief and hatred of his sin,  
turn from it unto God  
with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.”

It's not enough to start over.  
You must be born again!

If you are working to repair a broken relationship –  
don't just try to “start over” –  
“fresh starts” always end in the same place!

Rather, go to the cross.  
See your sin for what it is. (both of you!)  
See the mercy of Jesus for who *he is!* (and do this together!)  
And then – together – agree on how you hate your sin –  
and then turn from it unto God,  
with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience!

And then you have to believe that the other person actually means it –  
as much as you do!  
So that when you *think* that you are hearing the old pattern come back –  
you have to remember that they hate their old sin  
as much as you hate your old sin!

(We all have that tendency to hate *the other person's* sin more than we hate our own!  
You need to work on hating *your own sin* as much as you hate the other person's sin!)

But also notice *who* is circumcised.

Here at Gilgal the whole army is circumcised.  
It's like the 5<sup>th</sup> century conversion of a British tribe –  
where the whole tribe was baptizeded in a day.  
(Or an African tribe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where 90,000 were baptized at once,  
because their chief had become a Christian).

Nowhere does Scripture talk about baptism as something *we do*.  
Baptism is where *God puts his name on you*.  
We are baptized into Christ.  
We become new.

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.  
You have been enrolled in the army of the LORD of Hosts!

Your baptism is all about how you have passed from death to life!  
Like Israel passed through the Jordan River, and was circumcised –  
so that the reproach of Egypt might be rolled away.

They had the outward sign – and just a glimmer of the inward reality!  
We have the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit,  
so that we might be made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ!

### **c) The Coming Passover (10-12)**

And so while they were encamped at Gilgal:

#### **2. The Point of Passover (10-12)**

*<sup>10</sup> While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho.*

We had heard last time that they crossed the Jordan on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month –  
the day when they were to select the Passover Lamb.

Now – since they were all circumcised –  
they partook of the Passover on the plains of Jericho.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies!”  
Israel celebrates the covenant meal –  
the remembrance of God’s great victory over Egypt –  
even as they are encamped within sight of the great fortress of Jericho!

Your baptism – like Israel’s circumcision –  
is your rite of passage – your entrance into the “holy war” –  
the spiritual war where you are called to walk by faith,  
trusting God that he will do what he has promised!

And notice what happened as Israel was circumcised –  
as they ate of the Passover in the Land: (verse 11)

*<sup>11</sup> And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. <sup>12</sup> 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 Canaan that year.*

There is a movement from the spectacular signs of the Exodus  
to the ordinary signs of life in the Promised Land.

The sacraments of the wilderness included the pillar of cloud and fire  
leading them through the Red Sea.

The sacrament of entry into the Promised Land was the ark of the covenant  
leading them through Jordan River.

The sacrament of the wilderness was the manna that came every day – six days a week.  
The sacrament of the entry into the Promised Land was eating the fruit of the land.

If you ever wish that you could have the spectacular signs of the Exodus –  
just remember what happened to those two generations!

The generation that had the spectacular signs –  
did not believe – did not repent – and did not enter the Promised Land!

The generation that had the ordinary signs –  
did believe – did repent – and did enter the Promised Land!

And now that the army has been cleansed.

Now that the army has been nourished by word and sacrament,  
as Joshua...

### **3. Worship and Warfare (13-15)**

*<sup>13</sup> 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?”*

This is a great example of Joshua’s courage.

He sees a man with a drawn sword.

He does not run off and call for help –

neither does he brashly rush to fight this stranger!

Rather he asks,

“Are you for us, or for our adversaries.”

And the reply is important:

*<sup>14</sup> And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.”*

Whose side are you on?

No, Joshua, you don’t understand!

Whose side are *you on?!?*

God does not take sides!

I am the commander of the army of the LORD.

You, Joshua, are my servant.

Yes, you will cause Israel to inherit the land –

but only if you humble yourself and listen to my voice!

*And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped<sup>[e]</sup> and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?”<sup>15</sup> 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 where spiritual warfare begins:  
on your face before God!

Sometimes we get really busy with all the “doing of stuff.”  
And doing stuff *is* important!  
But when our doing of stuff gets in the way of falling flat on our faces before God,  
we need to reconsider where our hearts are focused!

Only when we are prostrate before the commander of the LORD’s army  
will we be able to hear his marching orders and do what he actually *wants us to do!*

So let us pray...