

Lesson Five

JOSHUA 5:1-12

Final Preparations

The Lord has begun to fulfill His promises to Israel: He has not left the people to die in the wilderness but has led them safely into Canaan. The miraculous act of grace at the Jordan has shown that "the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites" (3:10) and "that the hand of the LORD is powerful" (4:24).

It is still not time to attack the enemy, however. Militarily, the army is ready, but there are some final spiritual preparations to be made. Read 5:1-12.

Circumcision (5:1-9)

1. Recall the effect the Jordan crossing was supposed to have on the nations (see 4:24). How did it affect the Amorite and Canaanite kings (see 5:1)?

2. This gave Israel time to perform a rite that was insane from a military point of view—an operation that incapacitated most of the fighting men for several days. Read Genesis 17:1-14. What did circumcision signify for Israel?

4. God commanded all Israel to be circumcised once the accursed generation had died and the people were safely in Canaan. How did this roll away the reproach of Egypt?

5. a. Israel's circumcision was a cutting away of physical flesh. Among other meanings, it signified circumcision of the heart (see Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6), the cutting away of the stubborn callous that makes a heart unresponsive to God.

What "circumcision" do Christians experience as a sign of entering the new covenant (see Colossians 2:11-15)?

b. What reproach does this roll away, and how? (Think of your own life and Israel's reproach. If you like, see Romans 3:10-18; Ephesians 2:11-13.)

Optional Application:

a. Do you ever feel that God is either not loving or not powerful enough to save you from destruction? If so, why?

b. How has God rolled away this reproach that the Accuser whispers to you? Think of experiences in your own life and in biblical history. Look for passages of Scripture to memorize and meditate on this week (such as Romans 5:6-11; 8:1-4,31-39; Ephesians 2:1-7).

For Israel, the Passover sacrifice and meal pointed backward toward the redemption from Egypt and forward toward a full rest and redemption. When Jesus celebrated the Passover before His death, He demonstrated how His own body and blood would be the sacrifice of the new covenant (see Luke 22:14-20). In His crucifixion, He became the true Passover lamb (see 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Greek Christians call Easter *Pascha*, from *Pesach*, the Hebrew for Passover. Easter is the annual, and the Lord's Supper is the more frequent, Christian celebration of the true Passover. Both feasts point back to the redemption at Calvary and forward toward the banquet in the fulfilled Kingdom of God (see Luke 22:15-16; Revelation 19:9). Like Israel, we celebrate in the midst of, and in preparation for, the battles of Canaan.

Manna (5:12). God provided this food miraculously throughout the desert wandering (see Exodus 16:13-36). It looked like flakes of frost or resin, and tasted like coriander (see Exodus 16:14; Numbers 11:7). It nourished but was not very exciting fare.

8. Why was the ceasing of the manna significant for Israel (see Joshua 5:12; Deuteronomy 8:2-10)?

For Further Study:

- a. For the spiritual implications of manna, see Deuteronomy 8:1-18; John 6:25-59; 2 Corinthians 8:15.
- b. How is Christ for us like both manna and the fruit of the promised land?

13. List any questions you have about 5:1-12.

For Further Study:

Joshua 1:1–5:12 is about how God prepared Israel to begin conquering Canaan. Make your own outline or list of this section, showing how each episode helped prepare Israel. (What necessary preparation took place in chapter 1? In chapter 2?)

For the group

Warm-up. Ask the group what signs (evidence) God has given each of you that you have an intimate relationship with Him. Some people may think mainly of internal evidence like the awareness of God’s presence during prayer. Others may think of historical evidence like Jesus’ death and resurrection, or of personal experiences like baptism or deliverance from some affliction. Don’t spend a lot of time analyzing each other’s answers now. Come back to this question after you have looked at the signs God gave Israel: safe passage from the desert to Canaan, circumcision, the Passover, and the fruit of the land. Have you experienced evidence that parallels each of Israel’s?

Read aloud and summarize.

Questions. You could structure your discussion like this:

1. *Circumcision:* What did it mean? Why was it significant that Israel performed the rite at this point? (Look back to chapters 1–4 and forward to chapters 6–11. How did circumcision help prepare Israel for its battles?) What does circumcision mean for Christians? How is our circumcision a necessary preparation for the battles to possess our inheritance?

2. *Passover:* What did it mean? Why was it significant at this point? How did it help Israel prepare?

1. Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 99; Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 297.
2. Barker, 297; Woudstra, 102.
3. Technically, the covenant was a personal pact between the sovereign and the leader of the subject group, but the leader was acting for the group.