

To understand today's passage, we need to know some facts about the Hebrew culture and history. First, we should understand that the Hebrews saw the physical world as representation of spiritual realities. The Apostle Paul makes that point that was realized by his culture in the opening of his letter to the Romans. He tells us that the invisible things of God are clearly seen in the things that are made (Romans 1:20ⁱ). He also reminds us that we should learn from the experiences of Israel (1 Corinthians 10:6ⁱⁱ).

Next, we need to know the background of circumcision. It was the sign of a covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. The covenant promised that God would give them the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8ⁱⁱⁱ). They were to be to God as a nation of priests who followed His commands and who would love Him with their whole hearts (Exodus 19:5,6^{iv}). Moses explained that circumcision was a sign of the covenant, an outward picture of an inward act. He told the children of Israel to circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16^v). In other words, to be sensitive to God. It was to identify them as a people separated to God for His glory. This nation of diverse ethnicity was to be united in having a heart that was sensitive to God (Exodus 12:38^{vi}).

After Moses led the new nation out of Egypt, they came to the Jordan River and sent spies into the land, one spy from each tribe. Ten of the spies discouraged the nation from trying to take the land because of the ferocity and size of the people living there. So the people said they would rather die in the wilderness (Numbers 14:2^{vii}). For the next thirty-nine years the older generation did die out as they wandered through the wilderness. Now their children have entered the land. The battles had not yet begun.

² At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. Joshua 5:2-5

There is an important pattern in this book we might easily skip over. God tells Joshua to do something and then the text tells us he did it. It is repetitious for a reason. Joshua always obeys right away. This is another reason he is a foreshadow of the Messiah, Jesus. Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing. He only judged as the Father judged (John 5:19^{viii},30^{ix}). He is our perfect example.

God told Joshua to make flint knives. Did you know that flint can be as sharp as surgical steel? God told him to use the least painful of tools. Then he got to work and circumcised all the men who were born during the wilderness journey. Those men who left Egypt were circumcised sometime before they left. We don't know if it was when they were born or if it was possibly a renewal of the covenant sometime before they left Egypt. That may be why the text says, "a second time."

This was a great act of faith on the part of the nation. It made them vulnerable. They surely knew the story of their ancestors who tricked a town into circumcising their men and then while they were in that weakened condition slaughtered them because their prince had abused their sister Dinah (Genesis 34). Now they were the ones in the

weakened condition and within sight of the huge walls of Jericho. They knew that they could have been attacked. But what God ordered they obeyed.

Circumcision was the seal of the covenant God made with Abraham. You can read about it in Genesis 17. As they were about to launch the conquest of Canaan it was a reminder that the God of Abraham was their God and that He promised the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting possession to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 17:8^x). Four hundred years had passed, but now the promise was about to be fulfilled. If they wanted to see it fulfilled, they needed to keep their side of the covenant.

Circumcision was an outward sign of an inward change. Moses had told them to circumcise their hearts and not be stiff-necked. Today baptism represents a similar thing. It is a picture of dying, being buried, and raised to new life with Jesus (Romans 6:3,4^{xi}). It symbolizes entrance into the New Covenant we make when we give our lives to Jesus and receive His life. We exchange our sins for His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xii}). Then we become the nation of priests that Israel was meant to foreshadow.

The men of Israel knew their fathers had died in the wilderness because they did not have faith in God and showed their lack of faith by their continual murmuring. When their fathers had come to the Jordan River, they refused to trust God and go in. Now their descendants are in the same place, but they are trusting God to the point of even becoming vulnerable before their enemies. They put their complete trust in God.

We should notice that it wasn't because Joshua or the people said, "Hey, we haven't done what God told us do as a sign of the covenant between us and God. We need to be circumcised!" No, it was God who told Joshua they were forgetting an act of obedience. Compromise had to be dealt with before they moved forward. They needed to be right with God in every way before they began their campaign. God was about to deliver His side of the covenant and they needed to keep their side of it.

We too must see that we have buried our old life with Christ and been raised with Him before we move forward in the spiritual warfare we face (Colossians 2:11,12^{xiii}). If we are constantly complaining and rebelling like the older generation that died in the wilderness, we won't enter the land God has for us to take. Our enemies are not people, but the spiritual forces of darkness in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12^{xiv}). Those forces would have us be fearful and discouraged so that we don't take the land but remain in the wilderness of life. They would have us give up and become satisfied with just knowing what Jesus did for us. But **Jesus died to give us new life now, not some day in the future (Romans 8:11^{xv})**. He wants us to be soldiers of a spiritual nature who point others to the victorious life that can be ours in Jesus. He wants us to bear fruit that lasts (John 15:16^{xvi}), not take a little land and then let it be taken back. I'm not talking about temporal things, the passing governments of this world, or political power. I'm talking about what will remain forever, the souls of men and women. Onward Christian soldiers claiming the spiritual land for our King!

⁶ or 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. ⁷ 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. Joshua 5:6-7 These verses remind us that even though they were circumcised before they left Egypt,

their hearts were not changed. Some people are baptized and yet they show no change in their behavior. They don't trust God any more than they did before their baptism. This reminds us that outward signs are not what makes the change but are merely our declaration that we *claim* to be changed. It is possible to go through a ritual without experiencing what the ritual represents.

Again, we have an emphasis on obeying the voice of God. Their fathers did not enter the land because they refused to obey His voice. After all the miracles He did for them to set them free and bring them to the land, they still would not believe. God was giving them a land fit for herds and crops (milk and honey), but they refused to trust Him and accept it out of fear for their personal safety. God had delivered them from the Egyptian army and armies on the way to Canaan, but they feared He couldn't defeat the giants in the land. They were looking to their own ability and ignoring God.

The promises of God cannot fail (Joshua 21:45^{xvii})! If they would not obey, God would raise up a generation that would. That generation consisted of those whom Joshua circumcised at Gilgal. They would receive the promises given to Abraham. They received them by faith. The enemy was still behind their walled cities. No battles had been fought, but they were willing to act in faith in the 400-year-old promise because they knew God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19^{xviii}).

God had encouraged their faith with some amazing miracles like drying up the Jordan river at flood stage, and hasn't God shown Himself faithful to us? We can look back to the cross and know how faithful He was to redeem us. And we can also look at things in our lives and recognize the hand of God guiding us to faith and encouraging us with things that had to be much more than coincidences. Will we take hold of the promises of God and step out in faith because we know God cannot lie? Or will we choose to remain in the wilderness and die there? What has God been placing on your heart? Will you trust Him to bring it to pass in your life by stepping out in faith?

⁸ *When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.* Joshua 5:8 So they took a pause until they healed. The Jerichoans must have wondered what in the world was going on that the encampment of Israel grew so quiet for so long. But the fear of God kept the army of Jericho from attacking (Joshua 2:10,11^{xix}). God honored Israel's obedience. And God will honor our obedience. The things we fear are in God's hands. If He should let them come to pass, they will end up being for our good.

There is a two-fold use of a Hebrew word in verses 6 and 8. It is the word translated perished in verse 6 and finished in verse 8. The author was contrasting the difference in the two armies. Both were circumcised, but one *died* in the wilderness and the other inherited the land. Both were outwardly religious, but the younger generation had a heart of faith. *Thus the earlier generation 'finished' in the death of disobedience, while the generation of Gilgal 'finished' the act of obedience.*^{xx} Every one of us will finish in one of those two ways!

⁹ *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.* Joshua 5:9 Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word for roll. This act of faith rolled away the reproach of Egypt from them. There are various ideas for what this means, but my guess is that it means the influence of Egypt's ways and gods had affected their fathers, but this act of faith broke that cycle. The obedience to the covenant even when it left them vulnerable showed their

total trust in God's power and faithfulness. This was the final severing of Egypt from the hearts of Israel. Having gone through baptism of the Jordan crossing, they were now in the new land with a new chapter of Israel's history. The next chapter would for the most part be one of faith and obedience. It reminds us of Romans 12:1,2^{xxi}. They were presenting their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which was their spiritual act of worship.

What a glorious blessing it is to know that God rolled away the reproach of the world from our lives when we accepted the fact that our sins were upon Jesus as He suffered and died as a just punishment for those sins! Our shame is taken away. The enemy of our soul often points to our sinful past and tries to condemn us (Revelation 12:10^{xxii}). We only need to point to the cross and declare that our debt was paid in full. No more guilt for our past or shame in who we once were. And even now when our thoughts do not honor God, we confess our failure and see God's justice was satisfied on the cross for those sins too. We are clean from the world's garbage (1 John 1:9^{xxiii}). That is what Jesus was illustrating when He washed the disciples feet. It was a picture of what He was about to do (John 13:7,8^{xxiv}). To be in Christ is to have no more shame. We are more than debt free, we are credited with the righteousness of God in Jesus, spotless! That is what makes us ready to go in and claim the spiritual land that God has for us. He prepared good works in advance for us to step into (Ephesians 2:10^{xxv}). His victorious life in us will flow out from us when we step out in obedient faith.

¹⁰ 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. Joshua 5:10 How fitting that before they engage in the conquest of Canaan, they renewed the covenant God made with Abraham and celebrated the deliverance in Egypt that came with the Passover. It reminded them that the God who brought them out of bondage had now brought them into the Promised Land. God brings us out of this world's bondage to sin to bring us into the promised land of life and freedom in Christ. The Holy Spirit is a deposit of that life, guaranteeing we will experience the fulness of it when we enter the promised land of heaven (Ephesians 1:13,14^{xxvi}).

Passover was instituted when the angel of death passed over the Jewish homes in Egypt because of the blood of the lambs on the doorposts of their homes. It wasn't because the children of Israel were righteous. They deserved to die like the firstborn of Egypt died. They were just as sinful, but God provided a substitute. The Passover lamb was slain and eaten by the family in each household. The blood on the doorposts was the blood of a lamb. It pointed forward to the lamb of God who would die for our sins so that the angel of the second death would pass over us (John 1:29^{xxvii}).

We will see in the next passage that God doesn't pick people because of how good they are. He calls those who will receive conviction and place their faith in *His* ability to make them righteous. He doesn't choose those who try the hardest, for they think they can be good enough without Him. That is the sin of pride. He calls those who know they need Him, those who will humble themselves and trust in Him alone (1 Corinthians 1:26-29^{xxviii}).

¹¹ And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹² 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. Joshua 5:11-12 They were

probably taking the grain from the fields of Jericho to make their unleavened cakes and parched grain. The food was unleavened because they were celebrating Passover for a week (the feast of unleavened bread - Leviticus 23:6^{xxix}). The next morning out of habit they would have risen to collect their manna for the day, but there was none. Manna was provision for the wilderness, but now they are home in the land flowing with milk and honey.

It reminds me of our daily devotional readings. We have someone's writing on a passage that helps us apply the Scripture and understand it better. We will need it all through this life. But when we arrive in our heavenly home, we won't need a person to explain it. The Lord Himself, the living Word, will illuminate the Scriptures in ways that are beyond our present comprehension. Maybe that is what the Scripture means when it says the Lord will be our everlasting light (Isaiah 60:19^{xxx}). When we eat of that heavenly produce of that land, we will know our wandering in the wilderness is over.

We often speak of our life as a journey. We are looking for home, a place of rest, a place where we feel we truly belong. Does your journey feel like wilderness wandering? Are you tired of your daily routine and wandering if there is more on the other side of the Jordan? What we are reading about tells us there is! The lives of saints that have gone before us declare there is. But Gilgal is where it begins. **The circumcision of the heart is the first step. It is an end of trusting in self and a surrender to all that God has for you.**

I'm not declaring it is easier, but I'm telling you it is a lot more fulfilling. You can do everything to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31^{xxxi}), and that gives our actions meaning. Jesus promises to never leave us or forsake us (Matthew 28:20^{xxxii}). He promises to work everything we go through for our good (Romans 8:28^{xxxiii}). He even tells us He will transform us into the likeness of Jesus (Romans 8:29^{xxxiv}). The promised land of the kingdom of God lies before us. Will you let your shame be rolled away by the circumcision of your heart? Will you join that Passover feast knowing the blood of the Lamb of God has delivered you from the second death (1 Corinthians 5:7^{xxxv})? Then you are ready to enter the kingdom and take the land for our King.

Questions:

- 1 Why can we make spiritual applications from what took place?
- 2 What united them as a people?
- 3 Why did it take faith to obey God's command?
- 4 What story did they know that would concern them?
- 5 How does circumcision foreshadow baptism?
- 6 What are our enemies today?
- 7 How was our reproach rolled away?
- 8 In what ways does Passover convey the same message?
- 9 Why did the manna cease?
- 10 What land are we taking?

ⁱ **Romans 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

ii **1 Corinthians 10:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

iii **Genesis 17:8 (ESV)**

⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Also note that the nation is not all physical descendants, which reminds us that children of Abraham are children of faith not flesh and blood (Romans 4:16).

iv **Exodus 19:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

v **Deuteronomy 10:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

vi **Exodus 12:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

vii **Numbers 14:2 (ESV)**

² And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!

viii **John 5:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

ix **John 5:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

x **Genesis 17:8 (ESV)**

⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

xi **Romans 6:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

xii **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

xiii **Colossians 2:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

xiv **Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)**

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

xv **Romans 8:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

xvi **John 15:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

xvii **Joshua 21:45 (ESV)**

⁴⁵ Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

xviii **Numbers 23:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

xix **Joshua 2:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

¹¹ And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

^{xx} Hess, R. S. (1996). *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 6, p. 133). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

^{xxi} **Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{xxii} **Revelation 12:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

^{xxiii} **1 John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

^{xxiv} **John 13:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

^{xxv} **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

^{xxvi} **Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

^{xxvii} **John 1:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^{xxviii} **1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV)**

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

^{xxix} **Leviticus 23:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

^{xxx} **Isaiah 60:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

^{xxxi} **1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)**

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

^{xxxii} **Matthew 28:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

^{xxxiii} **Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

^{xxxiv} **Romans 8:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

^{xxxv} **1 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.