

Joshua 5

Consecration before Action

Introduction

God knows how easy people can forget.

So, He instructed Joshua to remove 12 stones in the middle of the Jordan and stack them at Gilgal.

- As a memorial of God's power
- As a means of communicating to their children
- As a witness to all others

Faith is renewed when we remember and trust God afresh with means like:

- The rite of circumcision
- The observance of the Passover

I. Rite of Circumcision (vv. 1-9)

1 Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.

2 At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again."

3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

4 Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt - all the men of military age - died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt.

5 All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not.

6 The Israelites had moved about in the desert forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD. For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

7 So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way.

8 And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

1. Humanly speaking, the time to strike the enemies was right—the enemies were fearful.

But God felt otherwise about the timing—He saw it as a time to observe again the rite of circumcision. It is consecration before action.

2. The significance of circumcision:

- Gen. 12:1-3
 - God called Abraham out of paganism and covenanted to bless him with a land, a seed and a blessing (land: Canaan; seed: Israel; blessing: Saviour).
- Gen. 17:9-14
 - God confirmed that covenant with Abraham by means of circumcision (sign of the covenant).
 - This was to be a continuing practice to remind Israel of God's promises; that they were chosen as God's people; that they were set aside by God to fulfil His purpose.

3. Lessons:

- The time may seem right for us to act, but before we rush to act, we must remind ourselves that we are people set aside to glorify God.
 - The “untimely” circumcision is to teach Israel that their entry into Canaan is not a campaign of military ingenuity, but a journey of faith in God (hence, there must be consecration before action).
 - Success/victory can stray us to glorify ourselves and not God (hence, consecration is of first importance when we begin to do anything for God).
 - For Israel, the danger was real—i.e. after entering the land, they might end up fighting for themselves only, or compromising with the pagans, and not setting themselves aside for God's purpose.
 - Therefore, God told them, “Circumcise first before you attack ...”
- The mishap of Israel's desert experience:
 - They wandered for 40 years and the original group of people had died.
 - They were circumcised yet they did not heed the voice of God (vv. 5-6).
 - They bore the mark of God's chosen people, but lacked the right response expected of God's people (except for Caleb and Joshua).
 - Hence, God fulfilled His purpose through another group.
 - A caution for us to note: external expressions, though helpful and meaningful, are no substitutes for a right relationship with God.

II. The Passover Observance (vv. 10-12)

10 On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.

11 The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

12 The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.

1. The significance of the Passover:

- It is associated with the 10th plague.
 - There was celebration and remembrance of God's mercy after being spared from the 10th plague (Ex. 12:13-14).
 - It was observed only twice so far—in Egypt and at Sinai (Num. 9:1-5).
 - It was to remind Israel of God's love and grace in sparing them from the horrible 10th plague in Egypt.
 - Remembrance renews our faith, especially if we are moving on to another phase of our faith journey.

2. The manna ceased.

- Israel was to eat from the produce of the land in Canaan.
 - God now provided for them through what the land produced forth.
 - While they were in the desert, it could not produce any food for them; therefore, God gave them manna.
 - Now, the land could grow food; therefore, there's no need for manna from heaven.
 - Manna was God's special supply for a season.
 - Now, He would provide for Israel through the normal, ordinary means—i.e. food from the land, but the people had to cultivate it.

3. Lessons:

- Most of God's provisions today come in normal, ordinary packages.
 - No need to wait for the spectacular in order to believe that God is providing for us.
 - We just go about working for our own needs as the Lord enables and blesses us.
- We are to live by faith, and not by charity.
 - Live by faith means working responsibly for our livelihood.
 - Live by charity means being reluctant to work because we expect others to provide for us, claiming this as God's favour upon us.

III. Commander of the Army of the Lord (vv. 13-15)

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

15 The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

1. Significance of this man's appearance:

- He came not to take sides, but to take over.
 - He gave these reminders to the people—God was their leader/commander; their allegiance was to Him, even Joshua was to submit to Him.
 - For success to be sure, Joshua would need to first see himself as a servant of God instead of as a leader of God's people.

2. Joshua was reminded that he was on holy ground.

- Two ideas of standing on holy ground:
 - The Lord is present.
 - The land was set apart for them by God (i.e. consecration of the land)—this implies that they were to use the land to reflect His holiness.

3. Lessons:

- We thank God for our own "Canaan" for it is the land of opportunities given to us by God.
- We are to reflect God's holiness as we live and work in our own "Canaan" so that we can shine as His people.

Personal Reflection

1. Read 5:10-12 - Passover and manna remind us of God's merciful deliverance and loving sustenance. In what area(s) do you need to trust the Lord to deliver and sustain?

2. Read 5:13-15 – Joshua was reminded to let the Lord take over command. In what area(s) do you need to let God take over control in your life?