



Circumcision, Passover, and the Commander Joshua 5

Introduction

The spiritual and typical truths in Joshua are rich and fascinating. As with other typical truths or "types" in the Bible, we find people or events foreshadowing or symbolizing someone or something to come. In the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles Paul and Peter understood and explained spiritual types (Matthew 12:40; Romans 5:14; 1 Peter 3:21). It is both interesting and enlightening to take a look at some of the types we find in the Book of Joshua.

Rahab is a type of the repentant sinner overwhelmed by the grace of God and willing to take risks of faith. Rahab valued her reception into the family of God as worth risking her life to protect the Israelite spies. She was rewarded by God's rescue, not only of herself, but also her family.

God had promised the land of Canaan to Israel and they were to go forward, cross the river, and possess it by faith. Canaan is also viewed as a type, representing the spiritual promises God has given His church, promises also possessed by faith. As with the Israelites, Christians must ford the river which separates us from our inheritance, laying aside "self" (or self-interest) and following the Lord Jesus by faith. The battle is won as we move forward with faith in God, who has already assured the victory.

In Chapter 5, we find still more "types" woven into the events. Circumcision, the sign of belonging to God's people, is a type of the cutting off of the old nature, the flesh, in order to strengthen the new nature. (Remove the "h" from "flesh", spell it backwards and you have "self", the tyrant against spiritual values.)

Also, the celebration of the Passover commemorating the Israelite's exodus from Egypt is fulfilled in the death of Jesus Christ for sin. Finally, Joshua is confronted by a powerful being, his Commander-In-Chief, whom he worships as Lord, and of whom Joshua himself is a type. Circumcision, Passover and the visit to Joshua are three highly symbolic events which complete Israel's preparation to enter Canaan.

In referring to types, Dr. William Newell said, "There is a realm of promise granted to the Christian corresponding to the land of Canaan as given to Israel. In Ephesians, which sets forth the Church's inheritance, and corresponds to the Book of Joshua, this realm is called 'the heavenly spheres' (Ephesians 1:20). Nothing, I believe, so awakens and holds the interest of Christians

in the Old Testament as the personal discovery of the riches placed there for them in the form of type and shadow" (The Moody Bible Course).

Outline of Joshua 5

- I. Circumcising the Second Generation – Joshua 5:1-9
- II. Celebrating the Passover and Cessation of Manna – Joshua 5:10-12
- III. Commander of the LORD's Army - 5:13-15

I. Circumcising the Second Generation – Joshua 5:1-9

A. On Jordan's West Bank - Joshua 5:1

1. Feared by enemy kings

Their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel. The crossing of the Jordan by the Israelites shocked the Canaanites. It paralyzed their kings and gave Israel time to regroup. So also the prince of darkness, Satan, retreats when he sees the weakest saint upon his or her knees praying to God. The apostle James exhorted, *Resist the devil and he will flee from you* (James 4:7). We would be bolder if we acknowledged that our enemy is already defeated (John 12:31; Ephesians 1:19-21; Colossians 2:15; 1 John 3:8, 4:4) and his days are numbered.

"The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him,
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him."
(from hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God",
Martin Luther, 1529)

2. A fabulous feat

The LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel. It is easy for us to gloss over this quickly, not grasping the scope of the event. Notice the "we" in *until we had crossed over*. It is significant to have an eye-witness account of this stupendous event.

B. The New Generation - 5:2-9

1. Command to circumcise - 5:2

"Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of

Israel again the second time.” When returning to Egypt to deliver Israel from Pharaoh’s grip, circumcision had been a source of contention between Moses and his wife. It appeared God would kill Moses if he did not exert his leadership and insist that his sons be circumcised (Exodus 4:24-26). The Hebrews had practiced the rite since God commanded Abraham to circumcise his household (Genesis 17:23-27). From that time forward, they were to circumcise boy babies eight days old (Genesis 21:4) as the sign of the covenant between God, Abraham, and his descendants.

2. Renewing the covenant - 5:3-6

The generation which came out of Egypt was circumcised but died in the wilderness. The new generation needed this renewal of their covenant and identification as God’s people. They were to be separated from the pagan peoples unto Him.

Today the circumcision pleasing God is spiritual not physical, *the putting away of the sins of the flesh* (1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6, 6:15).

3. Rolling away the reproach of Egypt - 5:9

During the wilderness wanderings, the Egyptians may have been inclined to say the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt “*to harm them, to kill them in the mountains*” (Exodus 32:12; Numbers 14:13-16; Deuteronomy 9:28). The circumcision of the Israelites in their land *rolled away the reproach*. God was again in full covenant relation with His people as He had not been with the generation that rebelled and murmured their way through the wilderness. Gilgal means rolling; Israel was now rolling ahead.

II. Celebrating the Passover and Cessation of Manna – Joshua 5:10-12

A. First Passover in Canaan

In their land at last, free from the old reproach of Egypt, it was most appropriate to celebrate the Passover. Their last act in Egypt was their first national act in their new home. With delight they performed “the precious Passover ordinance which spoke of their first deliverance from bondage, with its unique and humbling memorial, the blood of the slain lamb. Here is a lesson for us. Throughout all subsequent stages of our spiritual history, we are never to forget the initial one, our deliverance from the guilt of sin through the blood of ‘the Lamb that was slain’, and we are carefully to obey the word of our Lord as to that feast which He commanded ‘in remembrance of Me’ (1 Corinthians 11:24). In so doing, we also show the Lord’s death ‘til He comes” (Old Testament Studies, William R. Newell).

We are left to wonder about the process of slaying the lambs and setting up the ceremonial foods. Moses commanded the people to take “*a lamb for a household, keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month*”, and “*kill it at twilight*.” They were to display the lamb’s blood on the doorposts and eat the roasted lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They could let “*none of it remain until morning*” and were to eat it while fully clothed, in haste, ready to march (Exodus 12:3-8).

B. Passover and the Lord’s Supper

It is interesting and probably more than coincidental that the Passover was kept once again on the fourteenth day of a spring month, probably the same month as the Exodus. Passover is still kept by the Jews on that day, as did the Lord Jesus with His disciples on the night of their Last Supper. They also were fully clothed and ate in haste for the betrayer had left though the disciples did not know why. Afterward they moved out to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

After writing, *Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*, the apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians, *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

On that night the manna ceased. They now could live off the land. The wilderness experience was ended. The beauty and bounty of Canaan was God’s intended experience for them.

III. Commander of the LORD’s Army - Joshua 5:13-15

A. Appearance of a Man - Joshua 5:13

As Joshua contemplated exactly how he would take Jericho (inasmuch as he had no specific instructions) he lifted his eyes, always a good practice when one does not know how to proceed. In this case he was richly rewarded. *A Man* appeared standing before him *with His drawn sword in His hand*.

Not knowing it was the King of Kings, Joshua boldly he approached and asked, “*Are You for us or for our adversaries?*” Are you “Friend or foe?” Interestingly enough the answer was “*No*”, neither.

During the Civil War, President Lincoln was asked if he believed God was on the union’s side. Lincoln replied, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right” (Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library). He is for us when we are for Him.

B. Identity of the Man - 5:14

The *Man* responded with His identity and purpose, "as the *Commander of the Army of the LORD I have now come.*" Joshua instantly responded in three ways.

1. Adoration: he fell on his face to the earth and worshipped.
2. Acknowledgement of personal relationship: having kept both the circumcision and the Passover, Joshua was in right relationship with God and addressed the Man as "*My Lord*". Is Joshua's Lord your Lord?
3. Seeking God's will: Like Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-6), Joshua asked, "*What does my Lord say to His servant?*" This is a good question to ask when beginning any personal devotional time.

The answer to Joshua's question is "worship", the right response to God's holiness. In this theophany (an appearance of the Pre-incarnate Christ) the Lord Jesus Christ not only allowed Joshua to worship Him, He commanded it. "*Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.*" We are told in the sparse language of scripture *Joshua did so*. We can imagine he did so immediately, joyously, and with intense reverence.

Applications

1. Is your worship the result of putting away the deeds of the flesh, circumcision of your heart, and remembering His love and sacrifice for you?
2. How do you keep the Lord's Supper? Do you examine yourself beforehand and confess any sins such as malice or wickedness, to rid "the old leaven"? Do you keep the communion sacrament in sincerity and truth as you take the bread and drink the cup? Do you gratefully remember the Lord's blood shed for you as you meditate on His life given for you to cleanse you from your sins?
3. How wholehearted is your worship of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it with awareness of who He is? Is it intensely reverent? Does your worship include submission to His will with eagerness to find it out? Do you ask to know His will daily so you can follow it?
4. Will you take a moment now to thank God that you will one day see the Lord Jesus Christ standing before you in all His glory as He really is now, though invisible? Will you pause to worship Him?