



Study Series

Joshua: Week Four

Bible

Joshua 5:2-12 (NIV)

Circumcision and Passover at Gilgal

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 wilderness on the way after leaving Egypt. **5** All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not. **6** The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness 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 he had solemnly promised their ancestors 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.

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 the produce of Canaan.

Sermon Summary

Joshua 5 continues to focus on the spiritual preparation of the people of Israel. Instead of immediately commencing with the conquest, the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise the men of Israel before the nation celebrated the Passover. You would be forgiven if you find the account more than a little odd.

The practice of male circumcision began in Genesis 17:9-14 when the Lord established circumcision as the sign of the covenant; the mark in the flesh that symbolised relationship with the Him. Circumcision was also a requirement to celebrate the Passover (Exodus 12:48-49). However, circumcision could also be used metaphorically as a circumcision of the heart; describing a life marked by a dedication to the Lord (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Leviticus 26:41). It is this metaphorical connection that is important in Joshua 5. Essentially, while you would not be able to tell if a man was circumcised from looking at him clothed, you should be able to tell he was by observing how he lived. If he lived in accordance with the Law of God – which expressed the relationship with God – you could reasonably assume he had been circumcised. In other words, the external act was meant to reflect an inner reality.

And this is the point of comparison between the two generations that Joshua 5 speaks of. The first generation – the one that came out of Egypt – had been circumcised externally but were not circumcised of heart as was evidenced by their disobedience. The second generation – the one that had entered Canaan – had not been circumcised externally but were, at least to this point in the book, obedient to the Lord. This reflected their circumcision of heart. We see the obedience in Joshua 5 in that, as soon as the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise the men he does. Once this act has been completed the Lord states that he has taken away the reproach of Egypt. It isn't entirely clear what this means, but appears to refer to all that Egypt symbolised: slavery and disobedience in particular. And now, faithful in heart and body, the people celebrate the Passover, remembering not only God's great salvation but also reflecting on His provision as the manna stopped falling from heaven after they ate of the produce of the land.

The question that this text raises is, "What is Israel preparing for?" And the answer is that **they are preparing to be God's people in the land**. This was the Lord's plan from the beginning; that his people might be a living, breathing example of what it meant to live in relationship with him. It reminds us (again) that the main threat for the people wasn't Jericho or Canaanite alliances, but remaining faithful to the Lord.

And this leads us into application for we have been invited to participate with the Lord in the same mission; to be a living, breathing example of what it means to live in relationship with God through faith in Jesus and in the power of the Spirit. The question is, "**Are we prepared?**" The people of Israel prepared themselves to be the Lord's people in the land, are we ready for what God may have in store for us? This preparation isn't for some far distant event, but for the places that He sends us each and every day. It is this readiness that will be the focus of your discussion this week.

Next week we finally get to a battle; the battle for Jericho. This is what we often assume Joshua is all about (though I think we're seeing that this is not precisely true) and we struggle with the destruction of the city. We invite you to read that text through and be ready for next Sunday.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: What does being prepared look like for you? Take some time to share with the group how you prepare for a particular event or situation, what you do, what you think about etc... (This might be an exam, a presentation at work, a chat with someone challenging at the school gate.)
2. Take a moment to read Joshua chapters 5:2-12. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. The connection between internal faithfulness (the attitude of our heart) and external signs of faithfulness (what we do) are important in Scripture. What are the pitfalls of focusing on one over the other?
4. We have been invited to participate with God in His mission to restore and renew all things in Christ Jesus. How might you be being called specifically to be involved in this restoration and renewal?
5. What holds us back from participating more fully in this mission?
6. What could we do that would help us prepare for this mission? How might that shape your life? Your disciplines? Your values and priorities?
7. The celebration of the Passover in Joshua 5:10-12 focuses on the provision of God: from miraculous bread from heaven to a more mundane 'natural' provision of the land. How do you remember the provision of God? What sort of provision has he provided for you?

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 7. Thank God for his faithfulness and provision, and then pray for God's help to prepare for what He has called you to do (answers to question 4).