

The Rite of Circumcision

Joshua 5:1-9

Joshua 5:1-9 - *“So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.*

² *At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.”*³ *So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.* ⁴ *And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt.* ⁵ *For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised.* ⁶ *For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD—to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, “a land flowing with milk and honey.”*⁷ *Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.*

⁸ *So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed.* ⁹ *Then the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.”*

Background Notes

For the children of Israel, circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. Some of the other surrounding nations practiced circumcision, but for those nations it was used as a sign of entry into adulthood. For God’s people, circumcision was the sign of the covenant that He made with them, starting with Abraham. Genesis 17:9-11: *“And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.”* ¹⁰ *This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;* ¹¹ *and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.”* Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant.

In Joshua 5:2 we read that at that time the Lord said to Joshua, *“Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.”* What does the “second time” mean? Look again at verse 5: *“For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been*

circumcised.” So the “second time” was speaking of the new generation of men who had been born in the wilderness. They had never been circumcised, and this new generation needed to be circumcised in obedience to the Lord.

This act of circumcision, by the way, was a great demonstration of faith on the part of Israel, wasn't it? You wouldn't circumcise your army when the enemy was located only a few miles away, would you? Until the men were healed, they were like "sitting ducks" before the enemy! But God protected them because they stepped out in faith and obeyed Him in this matter of circumcision.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Spiritual circumcision should come after crossing the Jordan.

God has given us the account of the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan as an Old Testament spiritual picture of the Christian life. Egypt, with its bondage, portrays the satanic world system -- but we've been redeemed out from this world and out from under the power of Satan. Now God wants us to move on into the Promised Land of spiritual blessing.

God doesn't want us to remain wandering around in the wilderness of Christian experience! He wants us to live in the land of spiritual blessings -- and the land of spiritual battles. Read the Book of Ephesians in this connection.

Following the Ark through the Jordan River and out onto the Promised Land side pictures our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. That's what the two sets of twelve stones represented in Joshua 4. Romans 6 says that believers have died with Christ and have risen with Christ. This is the way God sees us! God expects us to know these spiritual realities and count them as true -- and then live in the good of them. Romans 6:11 says, "*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" This is our spiritual position in Christ.

When we recognize the truth that we have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ, and we live in the good of this truth, we are living in the Land! This is equivalent to crossing Jordan in the spiritual picture. Now we can enjoy our spiritual blessings in Christ, and now we can fight the spiritual battles that God wants us to fight against Satan's strongholds.

How does the rite of circumcision fit into the spiritual picture? The physical circumcision of Joshua 5 pictures the "spiritual circumcision" that we read about in the New Testament. Colossians 2:11 - "*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.*" The circumcision mentioned here - "made without hands" - is spiritual circumcision.

As physical circumcision has to do with literally cutting off the flesh, so spiritual circumcision has to do with cutting off the flesh -- the sinful nature. In the New Testament the sinful nature is called "the flesh." Spiritual circumcision is done by Christ, as we see here in Colossians 2:11. When Jesus Christ died for our sins, He died for our sinful natures as well. The flesh has been judged. Now we need to recognize this truth and practice spiritual circumcision.

How do we practice spiritual circumcision? We apply the knife of the Word of God to our flesh -- to our sinful natures. It is practicing the principle of "death to self." It is the judgment of "self" in the light of God's Word. It logically follows the crossing of the Jordan River, in the spiritual picture and in our experience. When we really realize the truth that we have died with Christ and we are now raised with Christ, then we should automatically begin to judge ourselves and put "self" and our sinful desires in the place of death. That's spiritual circumcision.

Listen to the words of Colossians 3:1-3: "*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*" ² *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.* ³ *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*" Now skip down to verse 5, where you have spiritual circumcision: "*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*"

Do you see the spiritual picture that we have here in Joshua 5? Spiritual circumcision should come after crossing Jordan.

2. Spiritual circumcision must come before conquering Jericho.

Jericho was a major enemy stronghold. Jericho blocked the whole way into the central portion of the Promised Land. For Israel to advance, Jericho had to go. In the spiritual picture of the Christian life that God has given here, Jericho represents the major barriers that Satan puts up to block our advance into the land of blessing that God has given us.

We talked about materialism as a "Jericho," a satanic stronghold, in Joshua 2 -- but materialism is not the only Jericho for believers today! A root of bitterness, for example, could be a Jericho in your life. Somebody did something to you or said something about you years ago, and you just can't forgive them. You're angry and bitter with them and you're angry with God, too. You can't move on in your walk with the Lord because of this "Jericho" of bitterness. That problem will never be resolved until you're willing to practice spiritual circumcision.

Are we willing to judge ourselves and put "self" to death? When that is done, Christ can begin to live His life through us. Only then does Galatians 2:20 really work out in experience: "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Spiritual circumcision must come before Jericho can be conquered.

Spiritual circumcision is not easy. It can be painful. Being circumcised with a flint knife is not a pleasant part of the picture, is it? Although putting the knife of God's Word to our flesh can be very painful, it must be done. Only when that is done can we move on and conquer the Jericho strongholds in our pathway. Spiritual circumcision must come before conquering Jericho.

Practical Application

Don't let the enemy scare you, when you can scare him!

Verse 1: *"So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel."*

What a difference a generation makes! Remember 38 years before this time, when Israel sent the spies to check out the Promised Land? Then the whole nation ran scared before the enemy -- except for Joshua and Caleb.

Now the tables were turned, and it was the enemy who was scared! Why? Did Israel have better weapons now? No! Did they have horses and chariots now? No! The Lord had changed the heart of the enemy! Once the enemy had despised and belittled and laughed at the Hebrew slaves from Egypt who talked about living in a Promised Land -- but they're weren't laughing any longer. They were scared! The Lord caused the heart of the enemy to melt when they heard what He had done for Israel -- and the Lord can do the same for us when we follow Him.

You've heard the expression, "The devil trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees." Now that's not a Bible verse, so don't look for it in your concordance -- but it is biblically true! James 4:7 says, *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* Are you under attack in spiritual warfare right now? Don't run scared! Submit to God. Resist the devil -- and he will flee from you.

Don't let the enemy get you down. Don't let the enemy scare you, when you can scare him!