

Joshua 5:1-12

In Canaan: Circumcision and Passover

1. God's greatness (5:1)

This outline covers only a short Scripture passage, but it provides enough food for thought: the nations trembled; Israel has to live by faith alone; they have to live with God in accordance with the covenant. This last aspect meant that circumcision and the Passover had to take place in Canaan.

In some Bible translations, 5:1 has been added to the previous chapter because both deal with the effect of the LORD's power on the nations. In 5:1, the hearts of the kings on both sides of the Judean hills melted with fear because of what God had done during the entry. Yet, we include this verse in this outline because it fits with the rest of ch.5 also.

***Question 1:** Are you able to point out the connection between the first verse and the following verses? Notice the importance of circumcision (v.2 ff.). In Genesis 34 we can read about the practical consequences of this ceremony (remember the story of Simeon and Levi against the men of Shechem).*

2. The circumcision (5:2-9)

The LORD charges Joshua to circumcise the people of Israel again with knives of flint. This announcement must have caused quite a commotion among the people. Their magnificent entry was past; they indeed had arrived in Canaan. However, the war still had to begin. On this day, they first have to put the knife to their own flesh.

***Question 2:** What in particular did the Israelites need as they conquered their inheritance?*

It is good to examine what circumcision actually signified. It was an Old Testament sacrament that in the new dispensation was replaced with baptism. Genesis 17:1b, 2, 10-14, as well as Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6 tell us about the meaning of circumcision. The heart of God's people had to be circumcised in order to live with the LORD in holy communion. (Think about the meaning of your baptism, HC, LD 26, Q&A 69.)

It is not so easy to explain why Joshua had to use stones made from flint. It is possible that the special importance of this occasion was emphasized. (In Exodus 4:25 we read that Zippora also used flint knives.)

A special occasion it is indeed! They are now in Canaan, the land that God in his grace had promised to and bestowed on them. Possibly, stone knives were used in order to demonstrate that circumcision was a centuries-old ceremony, from the 'stone age'. Circumcision dates back to the days of the patriarchs, to Abraham.

Israel has to be circumcised again. This does not mean that the previous circumcision was improperly or only partially carried out. Instead, it means that it was not carried out at all. Israel had been circumcised when they came out of Egypt, but the Israelites who entered Canaan were not. Verses 4-7 provide the reason for this.

Circumcision was not applied during their 40-year wandering in the desert. This passage does not give us the reason for this negligence. What is clear is that it had to do with the unbelief of the Israelites when the 10 spies returned. Their 40-year sojourn in the desert was a punishment. During this time of punishment, circumcision was not applied. In connection with this, we may recall what Stephen later said: "...the LORD gave them over to themselves" (Acts 7:42).

In the wilderness, Israel was not circumcised. The first instruction that they receive after entering Canaan is that they circumcise themselves. If they did not do this, they would not receive God's blessing but his curse instead. In order to properly understand this, Genesis 17:14 must be read. In addition, you may want to refer to second paragraph, this section, as well as HC, LD 27, Q&A 74; believers and their children *must* be baptized.

The place where this circumcision takes place is named after what happens here. It is called Gibeath-haaraloth, which means 'Hill of the Foreskins'. Thus, the memory of this event would be kept alive for the Israelites.

Was Israel reminded of this ceremony also because of the name Gilgal? This name has something to do with the verb 'to roll'. The LORD says to Joshua: "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." The '*Korte Verklaring*' translates Gilgal with '*wenteloord*' (turnabout place).

Many theologians have contemplated the meaning of the phrase 'the reproach of Egypt'. We will follow the following interpretation: The Israelites had to endure a lot of shame and disgrace in Egypt. They were a nation of slaves, without hope or any anticipation. They were even doomed to die. The Exodus had not brought about a sudden change of status. Not until they entered Canaan did it become clear that they were God's chosen nation; they were children of the covenant, God's children in the Promised Land. The reproach of Egypt pressed upon them in the desert for another 40 years because of their unbelief. They died under God's wrath. The entry into the Promised Land, however, marks the closing of their salvation from bondage. Therefore they now receive the sign of the covenant with the almighty God. Since their freedom lies before them, the LORD says that he has removed the reproach of Egypt from them.

3. The Passover (5:10-12)

The crossing of the Jordan (and thus the *entry* into Canaan) takes place on the tenth day of the first month (4:19). It was in the same month that the *Exodus* from Egypt occurred (Ex 12:2). That first month is roughly our month of April, marking the beginning of the season of harvest (Lev 23:1-14).

In four days -- on the fourteenth day -- the Passover has to be celebrated, for thus the LORD had commanded (Ex 12). Therefore, every family is supposed to choose the paschal lamb on the tenth day, on the day of the entry, on the day that the LORD demanded the circumcision. Circumcision was demanded especially in light of the coming Passover (Ex 12:48).

Question 3: *At the beginning of Israel's existence in Canaan we see both sacraments of the Old Testament being administered; one of them signifies the admittance to the covenant, and the other denotes the communion in the covenant. Which sacraments that we have today replace these two? Why*

do we have these two sacraments?

The Passover, the feast to commemorate the *Exodus* from Egypt, was celebrated during the *entry* into the Promised Land. For the Israelites this feast must have been of special importance. The feast would now remind them of both the Exodus and the entry; giving them double reason for joy in the Promised Land. All this they received on the basis of God's covenant of grace.

Question 4: *Check the meaning of the Passover, using Exodus 12 (esp. 12:27).*

We do not celebrate the Passover any more since this celebration pointed to the true Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Christ did come. Paul writes in the New Testament, "...Christ, our Paschal lamb, has been sacrificed..." (1 Cor.5:7). The Lord's Supper directs us back to his sacrifice. That is our celebration of the Exodus.

Question 5: *Compare Joshua 5:11 and 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. What was the purpose of the unleavened bread in the Old Testament? (Read Deut 16:3.)*

When Israel arrived in Canaan, they could eat from what the land produced, from what was seeded by the Canaanites. Manna ceased to fall from the sky.

Question 6: *Could we say that the miraculously-provided manna was replaced by ordinary food that was simply harvested from the land? Was it really that ordinary? (See Deut 8, esp. vv.10- 18.)*

Israel, God's covenant people, was in Canaan! Even though the entire country still had to be conquered, the prospects were very good since the Lord was on their side.

Question 7: *Israel's prospects were very good. How does our situation compare with theirs? Instead of Joshua we have Jesus, our Lord. As a result, baptism replaced circumcision and the Lord's Supper replaced the Passover. We are still in the desert (Rev 12:6); we are on our way to the perfection of God's kingdom (Heb 4:8; Jn 6:31-35, esp. v.35).*

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