

Joshua 4:19-5:15 • The Spiritually Prepared Generation

Introduction

The very first generation to be brought out of Egypt witnessed miracles and signs no one in the history of the world before or since has seen. They were not just given the written Word of God for the first time, but provided a personal covenant with the Creator and King of the universe Himself. They were not just provided with the priesthood and all its laws and customs for serving God, but given the first house of God in which His very presence often rested. This and much more was provided to this generation, and yet they so badly failed in their service to God that they had to be destroyed and replaced by a new generation that would accomplish these things in their place—a spiritually prepared generation that would serve God from the heart.

¹⁹Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. ²⁰Those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. ²¹He said to the sons of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ ²²then you shall inform your children, saying, ‘Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.’ ²³For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; ²⁴that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”

[Read 4.19-24]

Q: What are the significant differences in the particulars of Israel crossing the Red Sea on dry ground versus the new generation now crossing the Jordan?

1. The Red Sea crossing was an escape from the enemy, the Jordan crossing is an entrance to defeat the enemy.
2. The Red Sea crossing was effected through Moses, God’s representative through whom God’s Word was yet to be given; the Jordan crossing was effected by the Ark of the Covenant, the repository of God’s Word and the seat of His glory.
3. At the time of the Red Sea crossing the people were in fear for their own lives and desired to return to Egypt; the people at the Jordan crossing were in fear of God and ready to take the Promised Land.
4. The Red Sea crossing was not marked by memorials as the Jordan crossing was because there was nothing to be learned from the first generation.
5. At the Red Sea crossing the angel of God (Exodus 14:19) was behind the people to confuse and defeat the enemy; at the Jordan crossing the Captain of the Lord’s host was ahead of the people to confuse and defeat the enemy.
6. At the Red Sea crossing the people did not believe in God and Moses until after the crossing was effected (Exodus 14:31); at the Jordan the people already believed and feared God and Joshua.

Q: What is special about “the tenth of the first month”?

A: It is the Hebrew month “Nisan”, exactly 4 days prior to Passover, the exact day that the Law requires for the Passover Lamb to be set apart.

Q: What does their crossing the Jordan on dry ground signify spiritually?

A: It is a type or symbol of baptism, death being represented by going “under” the water—or walking through the Jordan with the waters piled up—and new life signified by coming up out of the water.

Q: How do all these things work and come together to teach something of God’s character and His working?

A: Both groups at each of the crossings were provided the opportunity to fulfill God’s will and serve Him, but only the latter had the right heart, was baptized by obedience to the Word of God, and would live out the elements of the Passover actively rather than reactively. In this crossing we see the works of justification, salvation, and sanctification in their earliest Old Testament examples. It’s not so much about the crossing of the Jordan as it is the leaving behind of the old life to take hold of the new.

¹Now it came about when all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard how the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had crossed, that their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel.

²At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make for yourself flint knives and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time.” ³So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth.

⁴This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, died in the wilderness along the way after they came out of Egypt. ⁵For all the people who came out were circumcised, but all the people who were born in the wilderness along the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised. ⁶For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the voice of the LORD, to whom the LORD had sworn that He would not let them see the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷Their children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them along the way.

⁸Now when they had finished circumcising all the nation, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. ⁹Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

Q: What was the overall purpose of this event, these signs?

A: “That all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever”. In other words, to non-believers signs are to establish the power and authority of God, to believers they are to evoke reverence and worship. Both, in their own way, testify to God’s glory.

[Read 5:1]

Q: What was accomplished in 1 day that had not been achieved in the 470 years of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness?

A: The “hearts melted” in the disobedient kings and nations that for all that time had been completely unresponsive to God and had therefore been dedicated to destruction at the hands of the invading Israelites. Unfortunately, their hearts did not melt into repentance or faith in God, but rather melted in the presence of judgment.

Point: *The work of God accomplishes 1 of 2 end results: It either converts non-believers or convicts them. It is possible for some to witness God’s work, even attribute it to Him, and still remain unchanged from the heart where it matters. This is the key difference between the Israelites and the Canaanites; although they both witnessed the same events, the choice of their hearts caused them to come away with opposite results.*

[Read 5:2-9]

Q: What is meant by “circumcise again the sons of Israel a second time”? Are they really undergoing a second physical circumcision?

A: This is teaching us about the true nature and intent of circumcision. Another way of stating this might be, “Now that they have been proven to be circumcised from the heart, perform a second, physical circumcision as outward proof of their inward condition.”

So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.
—Deuteronomy 10:16

“Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.
—Deuteronomy 30:6

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds.”
—Jeremiah 4:4

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.
—Romans 2:28-29

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.
—1 Corinthians 7:19

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.
—Galatians 5:6*

Point: *These people are that right example of the greater intent of circumcision, having been obedient and wholly devoted **BEFORE** undergoing the physical act itself, thus showing from this earliest date in Israel's history God's true intent and teaching behind circumcision.*

[Read 5:10-12]

Q: What is significant about “unleavened cakes and parched grain” as part of the food they ate from the land?

A: These were processed foods, not raw ingredients. They would have been taken from the hands of the people or storehouses of the land. It's a powerful but subtle way of stating that just as the manna was provided by God to this point, it was no longer needed in God's continued provision in the Promised Land. In other words, God was not “discontinuing” His provision, He was changing the manner in which it was provided.

[Read 5:13-15]

Q: As pointed out previously, “the angel of God” fought against the Egyptians at the time of the first crossing and now there appears the “captain of the host of the Lord”. Are these different beings?

A: No, they are the One and same pre-incarnate Christ.

Q: How do we know for sure that this is not just another angel?

A: Throughout Scripture, whenever men mistakenly begin to worship angels, they are immediately told to stop so doing; Joshua here is not dissuaded, thus revealing that he is in the presence of a member of the Godhead.

Q: What is the meaning of His answer to Joshua's question? Which side is He on?

A: He is on **GOD'S** side, the side of whoever is prepared to serve God from the heart. He does not automatically side with someone because of their birth or the rituals they adhere to, even if both were originally established by God. It's a message that calls for continued obedience to God now and forever, that the only guarantee of having God on your side is to be obedient to Him.

Q: So why does pre-incarnate Christ change in appearance from a pillar of clouds/pillar of fire to One with a sword drawn and waiting on the other side of the Jordan?

A: He assumes the necessary tools and roles needed to appropriately lead in each situation. In the wilderness they needed a guide or light to illuminate their path, in the Promised Land they need a conqueror to clear their path. Christ's role is similar in both situations in that He is always ready to lead His people in God's work both internally (the heart) and externally (God's kingdom).

¹⁰While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.

¹³Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?”

¹⁴He said, “No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD.”

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, “What has my lord to say to his servant?”

¹⁵The captain of the LORD'S host said to Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.



Overall Application

- *Are you more like the people of the first crossing—fearful and in need of rescue, or the people of the second crossing—prepared to obtain your spiritual inheritance?*
- *Do you see the greater work behind the things of God in your life, or like the first generation are they merely rituals and rules with little support from your heart? Do you see the intent of God for our personal commitment and obedience behind such things as baptism and salvation, that they're meant to prepare us, not be ends unto themselves?*
- *Do you realize that God has already prepared the way before you? Do you realize He is not sending you out alone and only expecting you to finish what **HE** has begun?*