

Christ in our Covenant I Joshua 5

The covenant sign

5:1 As soon as 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 that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.

2 At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." 3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. 4 And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. 5 Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. 6 For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 7 So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

We saw from last week that 5:1 was a sign to Joshua and the Israelites that God was with them and was going to make good on His promise of driving out the enemies. It also serves as a transition to the next major section in the book of Joshua, the actual taking of the land, and it provides the context and necessary environment for God to do some serious work on His people.

When going out to war, it's essential that proper preparations are made. The team that doesn't prepare well, forgets to put on armor, doesn't draw up a plan, is the team that gets beat. Now what makes this interesting, is God is wanting to make some final preparations before they go out to war, and it doesn't have anything to do with physical war. It hardly has anything to do with their opponents. What it does have to do with is their hearts, their allegiance to Him, and their obedience to His Word, and their identity as His people.

We saw this similar development beginning as the Israelites were camped on the other side of the river, and there was a consecration of themselves to God because God was about to do something big, and they put the ark out in front of them. The presence of God and the priority of His word and worship were being restored. You could call this a revival was going on among the Israelites.

And God is continuing this theme, the people are not yet fit for the taking of the Land. What's the problem? A whole bunch of these men are uncircumcised. What's the big deal with that?

Genesis 17: 9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

God makes an earlier promise to Abraham. I'm going to bless you, make your name great, and through your offspring all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. And here's how I want you always remember this promise... circumcision. By it you will remember the promise and by it you will draw a line around the covenant community.

If you are not circumcised, you are not one of God's people, instead of the flesh being cut off from that individual, he will be cut off from God's people. Abraham responds in faith and obedience and institutes the sign of the covenant. And all generations after him are to continue this practice.

The people of God go down to Egypt, become slaves. God raises up Moses to deliver them out of slavery. The way God rescues them is tells them to sacrifice lambs and the blood of the lamb will go on the doors, and the angel of death will pass over you and kill the Egyptians. They not only smear the blood, but they eat the lamb, this was the feast. Annually the people of God were to eat the lamb in remembrance of how God delivered them from Egypt. Failure to celebrate the Passover would cause you to be cut off (Num. 9:13). And furthermore, you couldn't celebrate the Passover unless you were circumcised (Exod. 12:48).

So obedience to God's Word is at the heart of what God is doing here to the Israelites in Joshua. That obediences means faith in God's promise, the sign of circumcision, and the partaking of the Passover meal.

Right as they cross, it's time for passover. On the 10th day of the month was when they came up out of the Jordan, and on the 14th day of the month is when the celebration is supposed to take place. And here they are with an entire next generation that was not circumcised, and they had evidently not been celebrating the Passover either, we only know of one other time during the last 40 years. They were walking in neglect or downright disregard for God's Word. They had the mark of being God's people but they failed to internalize it. (It's not coincidence that the generation that proves faithless fails to pass on the sign and celebration of the Promises given to Abraham.)

And what does God do... He steps in, Joshua we are getting back to my Word, we aren't going into this land until my people are obeying my word. I need you to circumcise the next generation. and what does Joshua do? Exactly what God tells him to do. V.2 and 3 are almost verbatim repeats, emphasizing Joshua's strict obedience. This is the pattern we have been seeing with Joshua, and one of the clear focuses of the leadership transition from Moses to Joshua, we saw back in chapter 1, **"6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.**

So what is God doing in between crossing the river and taking the land? God is reorienting His people around His presence, His Word, and His promises. He's cultivating in them the true heart that fits them for their inheritance. What's most important is not their enemies? What's most important is having their hearts recalibrated, renewed, as one nation under their God. That all rises and falls based on their obedience.

8 When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. 9 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

On the backside of their obedience God declares their reproach has been rolled away. Gilgal sounds like another word that means to roll. The reproach of Egypt likely means the Israelites were seen as a joke and their God a joke as well. They've been enslaved for hundreds of years and wandered around in the wilderness

for 40 years, pretty easy to start wondering about these people. They were the laughingstock among the nations. But God stamps this day as the day He begins vindicating His people and His own name among them.

There's a few points of application for us.

1. *Experience of God, identification of God, and outward religion is no guarantee of inward grace*
 1. The generation that left Egypt experienced supernatural deliverance, crossing through the red sea, miraculous feedings in the wilderness, bearing the marks of circumcision, and yet God says, because of your unbelief you will not enter the land.
 2. We must be on guard against outward religion as a substitute for true inward spiritual life.
 3. Circumcision, Deut.10 tells us, is about the circumcision of your heart, and Paul in the NT would argue the same thing. Circumcision and holiness are not the same thing.
2. *God is faithful to His people, even though one generation couldn't get in, the fact that God continued to pursue blessing His people shows His grace and patience and commitment to His own promise.*
3. *Because God is so gracious and faithful to us, we should respond in faith and obedience, putting Him at the center of our hearts. We put obedience to His Word in the highest place, knowing that its through obedience that we get to experience and enjoy the inheritance of all His promises. We should delight in cutting off the sin of our hearts, pursuing holiness.*
4. *We may be mistreated. We may be mocked, but if we keep on obeying, God will vindicate us.*

With circumcision in place, it was then time to continue obedience in celebrating the Passover.

The covenant meal

10 While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. 11 And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

There are two elements here that the narrator focuses our attention on.

1. The Israelites are keeping the Passover in the Promise Land. Not only are they being obedient, but its happening in the Land God promised to give them. God's faithfulness is on full display here. In the language used, there is an intentional linking of this Passover with the first passover coming out of Egypt. In the first passover you are leaving slavery, and in this passover, you are entering your land. God is faithful.
2. The day after the Passover, in perfect timing, the miraculous manna stopped and they began eating off the land in Canaan. Here again, the faithfulness of God is put front and center. Three times in these two verses its repeated for emphasis, *they ate the produce of the land, they ate the produce of the land, they ate the produce of the land.*

God had been supplying their needs miraculously in the wilderness with manna, but here too was a miracle that made the first miracle no longer necessary, they were eating produce coming up out of the ground in Canaan.

The eating is a sign that the land is theirs. God has brought them here. They are having a party and eating off the land, a foretaste of the rest of the land that God has going to give them.

What a picture this is... the people of God in enemy territory, and instead of military calculation there is ceremonial celebration. They circumcise themselves and then throw a party. You don't have to fear the enemy when you are walking in God's commands, they are partying in worship in enemy territory.

This reminds us of Psalm 23, “You prepare before me a table in the presence of my enemies, my cup overflows.” Ps.23.

Now that we have seen what is going on in the immediate context of Joshua, we need to zoom out to get the deeper meaning. Because as we saw last week, Joshua is not the savior, he’s not equipped and able to bring them to God. The land fails to be everything they wanted it to be, because they have sin in their hearts. So Joshua is pointing us to the greater Joshua, Jesus, and the Promise Land is pointing us to the greater land, our inheritance in Christ, God Himself.

So what I want to do now is trace the covenant sign and the covenant meal, through the Bible to see how they apply to us today and point us to Jesus.

Christ in our covenant

First, we’ll take circumcision, the sign of the covenant given to Abraham. In the Bible though we see covenants between people, the clear focus is on God making a covenant with humanity. God formalizes His relationship with people through what He calls a covenant, which includes the promise of life for obedience and a curse of death for disobedience. On top of this, there is a sign that tangibly reminds and displays the promise.

The Bible holds out two primary covenants

1. The covenant of works given to Adam, dependent upon Adam’s working, received by working
2. The covenant of grace given through Christ, dependent upon Christ’s working, received by faith

God creates Adam, enters into relationship with him, blesses him. Then God sets up the promise and curse structure with corresponding obligation of obedience.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Gen. 2:16-17

Though the word covenant is not specifically used in the Adam story, all the elements that make up a covenant are there. And later we see in **Hosea 6:7, “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.”**

The sign for this covenant is the tree of life that was also there in the garden. It was there to point to the promise of everlasting life if Adam and Eve would obey. Adam and Eve break the covenant, They are cursed, sent out of the garden, out of the presence of God, and thrown into the wilderness where sin, suffering, and death reign. That’s the covenant of works given to Adam, completely dependent upon Adam’s performance.

But right as this is happening, something glorious takes place. A new covenant of grace is proclaimed to them, a covenant that would not be dependent upon Adam’s performance, but on the performance of another, from one of their offspring, of which they could receive if they believe in the promise.

Gen. 3:15, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Right there as Adam and Eve just blew it the gospel is proclaimed! God pursues them in love with another way. God opens the way back to the garden. How? They are to believe in the offspring to come and the work that He will accomplish. Their obligation for covenant blessings is not performance, but faith. So all the focus goes to this offspring that is to come, which continues to unfold throughout the OT.

We gain more clarity to this covenant in a formal way when God calls Abraham from Ur. He enters into relationship with this wicked pagan worshiper. God gives Him a promise in **Gen. 12**, “**I will bless you, you will become a great nation, and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.**” Then in **Gen. 15:6** “**And he *believed the LORD*, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**”

Abraham was made righteous as he did what? Believed in the promise of God.

Romans 4:9-12 For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. 10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. 11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

A new covenant has been established, where you get life if you believe the promise of God that is to come through this offspring. This covenant sign of circumcision is given. Signs point to things. So this sign is to point to the Promise. That sign is circumcision, the male reproductive organ, in which, for Abraham, the promise was completely tied to, because there was coming an offspring from his body. *Signs confirm God's promise, but they also remind us of God's promise, and their purpose is to build and strengthen our faith.* Now Abraham bears on his body the marks of the promise of God, whenever he is tempted to doubt, he's got the experience of this sign in his body that reminds him of God's goodness and His promise.

This is why it was such a big deal for the Israelites to continue the practice of circumcision, because inside the circumcision is the proclamation of the promise of God about His offspring, the very one they are to put their hope in. God wasn't just making them do a bunch of random ceremonial acts, the act was tied to their identity as a people under His Lordship, united around the promise of the coming Messiah. The uncircumcised are cut off because they do not have the sign of the promise, not believing in the promise.

What good is the land if there is no longer a proclamation of the Messiah for them to believe in? What good is it if you get the land but are cut off from God? The land is not the blessing, the land points us to the greater inheritance of God Himself.

So then circumcision, pointing to the chosen offspring, points us to Christ. Not only because it reminds us of the seed to come, but even in the act, in circumcision, we see how salvation was going to be fulfilled. In circumcision the flesh is cut off, that flesh symbolizing sin, in order that one can be accepted by God, be welcomed in as His people. We realize that we cannot cut off our flesh, and therefore we deserve to die. Jesus on the cross, is the holy One, acceptable to God, but who is cut off for the sake of His people. He tastes death so that we may live. His blood in place of ours.

So the question is for us, why don't we celebrate circumcision? Because the promise of the Messiah has come. So while Abraham and the OT were looking forward to Christ through circumcision, we look backward at Jesus and His work, and the NT replaces circumcision with Baptism.

Just as circumcision was an individual and initiatory rite to identify with the people of God and the promise of God, so baptism is the NT way of receiving the sign of the promise, identifying with the church and looking back at the person and work of Jesus. Circumcision happened once in the life of an Israelite, Baptism happens once in the life of a christian. Blood is shed in circumcision, no more blood is necessary because of Christ. The entire ceremonial and temple system was done away with through Christ, because He is the One they always pointed to. The sign of baptism identifies us with faith in the performance of Jesus. That we have died with Christ and that we live with Christ. We are saying yes to the covenant of grace by which Jesus fulfills the covenant of works on our behalf. Faith is then... as for Abraham, counted to us as righteousness. Hallelujah! (Paul on circumcision??)

In the same way we see the Passover meal find its significance and fulfillment in Christ.

The Passover meal was a celebration taking place as God was delivering them out of Egypt. In that first Passover, the lambs were slaughtered as a substitute for their own death. From slaves of Egypt to service and worship of God. This was then to be their annual reminder and celebration, an “Ongoing” remembrance

And then we read in the gospel of John as He is baptizing in the Jordan, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Later it’s time to celebrate the Passover so Jesus takes His disciples and gathers them in the upper room.

Luke 26:15 And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. 18 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Jesus begins the Passover meal, and as was customary for the head of the household to interpret the story of Passover with the elements, Jesus begins to tell a different story and gives new meaning with new elements, instituting a new meal. The Passover and the Lord’s Supper happen together, and the elements that Jesus uses are bread and wine. there is no Lamb. Why? Because the lamb was Jesus. The Passover all along had been pointing to Jesus, where He would absorb and receive the wrath of God in the place of sinners so that sinners could be forgiven.

Jesus intimately ties together the celebration meal and deliverance. The celebration meal is the way in which we are delivered. The passover looked forward to the cross, the Lord’s supper looks back. The Passover, which required blood, pointing to the giving of Jesus blood, and therefore our ordinance of remembrance does not have blood, but has bread and wine. Jesus seen in John’s gospel as the true bread of life, the manna from heaven, and In John 2, Jesus’ first miracle is to provide the most abundant and rich wine at a wedding party. For those that new their OT promises, Isaiah 25, when this Messiah shows up wine will overflow, it will be a time of feasting. The wine points to the blood of Christ, only available to us as He would be crushed like grapes in the winepress of God’s fury.

We have bread and wine. The Lord’s Supper , being both bread and wine points to both sustenance and celebration. *We feed on Christ and we feast on Christ.*

The supper also points us to another table and meal that is coming at the dawn of the new age of the kingdom, in the new heavens and new earth, where we will feast with Christ, a marriage supper with the Lamb.

Jesus in the Lord’s Supper reinterprets the Passover and shows us that the Passover was pointing us to a greater exodus, not one from slavery in Egypt into the land of Canaan, but one from slavery to sin into presence of God. Passover was a meal commemorating the covenant and significant saving work of God when He brought them out of Egypt. The Lord’s Supper is a meal commemorating the new covenant and significant saving work of God when Jesus died on the cross.

The Lord’s Supper also has horizontal dimensions, just as the Passover was to take place within families, so the Lord’s Supper is the new people of God taking a family meal together, having been brought into the family by Christ’s blood.

The signs and ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are given to us as tangible displays of God's promise and presence and power. We don't keep these ordinances to merit favor with God, we keep them to keep us pointing ourselves and our faith toward the gospel.

Christ is our meal prepared before us in the presence of our enemies.

Adam eats a meal that kicks him into the wilderness, the tree of life in the garden he no longer has access to. A new tree of life comes in the cross of Christ
This meal we eat Christ that gets us back into the garden