

**Calvary Pandan Bible Presbyterian  
Church Singapore**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE STUDY CLASS**

**LESSON 5**

**JOSHUA 5**

**Joshua 5:9** – *“And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.”*

**INTRODUCTION**

The Israelites amazingly and miraculously crossed the Jordan River by God’s Almighty power. God had exalted Joshua, His servant, before the children of Israel. The Israelites had been united. They were submissive and obedient to the commands given by Joshua. At the same time, God fulfilled His covenant-promise to Abraham and the children of Israel. The older generation that came out of Egypt (we may call them “the exodus generation”) had died. Now a new generation (we may call them “the wilderness generation”) was born during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Before Moses died, he rehearsed the Law of God to “the wilderness generation”

(Deuteronomy 1:1-27; 4:1-2).<sup>1</sup> They needed to know the laws and commandments which the LORD their God had given to “the exodus generation” at Mount Sinai. Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy with a theological perspective with this desire accomplished. The Book of Deuteronomy was given to Israel when they were in Trans-Jordan prior to the occupation of the Promised Land. They should know the Law and not only must they not repeat the sin of unbelief and rebellion of their forefathers (Deuteronomy 1:23-36) but to realize that the entrance into the Promised Land was only the beginning. Remaining in the Promised Land as a nation of godly people requires all Israel to obey God’s Law and pass the same to the next generation. This Israel must do till the First Coming of the Messiah!

The Israelites were now encamped on the Cis-Jordan not far from the fortified city of Jericho. Jericho was the first enemy stronghold, which they would conquer. But before they could attack the city, God required Israel to perform two more things, namely, the circumcision of all the males and the observance of the Passover. A third imperative was a personal encouragement to Joshua to reaffirm the presence of the LORD in his leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> The word “Deuteronomy” is a

The chapter may be divided according to the following headings:

- 1) The Impact (5:1);
- 2) The Circumcision (5:2-9);
- 3) The Celebration (5:10-11);
- 4) Manna ceased (5:12));
- 5) The Encounter (5:13-15).

## COMMENTARY

### The Impact – 5:1

All the kings of the Amorites and of the Canaanites heard how the LORD of the Israelites had dried up the waters of the Jordan River enabling them to cross on dry land. We learn that there were at least seven tribes who inhabited Canaan (3:10). However, the inspired writer now used two names: the “Amorites”, who lived in the highlands; and the “Canaanites”, who lived in the coastal plains to represent all the seven tribes of the land. They heard of the miraculous account of the crossing of the Jordan River. They did not actually see the crossing themselves. But the rumour was enough to demoralize them. The same words (in Hebrew) used by Rahab when she confessed to the two spies, saying (2:11): “our hearts did *melt*, neither did there remain any more *courage* in any man”, and here the inspired narrator wrote (5:1): “that their heart *melted*,

neither was there *spirit* in them any more.”<sup>2</sup>

Fear gripped their hearts. They did not have the courage and strength to immediately attack the Israelites. Israel did not know that the Amorites and the Canaanites were fearful, and also did not know the reason why they were not attacked. They did not have to know. All they need to do was to trust in the LORD to protect them and to give them the Land as He had promised. What the enemies were thinking and feeling and planning were of no consequence. God had plans for Israel that will further test and strengthen their faith in the LORD before they could claim and conquer the Land.

### The Circumcision – 5:2-9

The next requirement from the LORD for Israel was to circumcise all their males. This was indeed a test of their faith! From a military standpoint, to circumcise all the Israelite males, especially when they were in enemy territory, was suicidal. Circumcision of all the males would incapacitate and immobilize them.<sup>3</sup> It would take at

<sup>2</sup> “melted” in Hebrew “*masas*”; and “courage” and “spirit” in Hebrew both words are the same, “*ruah*”.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 34:24 And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and **every male was circumcised**, all that went out of the gate of his city. 25 And it came to pass **on the third day, when they were sore**, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took

least a week for the wounds to heal. It would make military sense to circumcise them BEFORE Israel cross the Jordan and not AFTER. There was the overflowing River Jordan, which acted as a natural barrier against any attacks from the Amorites and Canaanites in Cis-Jordan. Militarily speaking, this circumcision in enemy territory would be considered a big blunder as the nation would be defenceless as all their men would be feverish and rendered helpless.

But the LORD commanded Joshua to do so. Joshua must submit to the LORD and act immediately – no question asked. He was told to make “flint knives” to circumcise the Israelites. The statement that the Israelites were circumcised again the second time was probably a reference to the time when Israel was in Egypt. They probably circumcised ALL their males BEFORE they left Egypt just as the LORD required Moses to circumcise his son before he began his ministry to bring Israel out of Egypt.

The phrase “second time” does not mean that the Israelites had already been circumcised and that they were required to circumcise again in Gilgal. They would not circumcise twice as the texts made very clear. The fact was that those who were

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each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.

born in the wilderness – “the wilderness generation” – had not been circumcised. In other words, those who came out of Egypt and survived the wilderness wandering, like Joshua and Caleb, did not have to be circumcised again.

The fact that God commanded Joshua to circumcise “the wilderness generation” indicates the significance of the rite. Circumcision was not merely a religious ritual. Its significance was deeply rooted in Israel’s special relationship with God. God made a covenant-promise with Abraham, and the sign or mark of that covenant was the rite of circumcision. Those who were not circumcised were cut off (die) from the people of God.<sup>4</sup>

The circumcision was the external mark that reminded the Israelites that they were God’s chosen people with a spiritual relationship. However, circumcision also has a spiritual significance in relation to the Abrahamic covenant. The LORD’s real intent for the sign of circumcision was that Israel would circumcise the heart. The heart circumcision would involve loving God with all their heart, and

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 17:10 This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; **Every man child among you shall be circumcised.** 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. . . . 14 And **the uncircumcised man** child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, **that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.**

with all their soul, that they might live godly lives (Deuteronomy 30:6). Circumcision therefore signifies two things. It marked the nation Israel as God's chosen people endowed with national and physical blessings. It also marked a spiritual side in that "Abraham believed God and was counted unto him for righteousness."<sup>5</sup>

The covenant-promise was made with Abraham and circumcision marked the Israelites as the seed of Abraham. They belong to God. Hence Joshua circumcised all the male children of Israel at Gibeath-Haaraloth—literally, "the hills of the foreskins" (v.3).

The circumcision of "the wilderness generation" across the Jordan was important. It was the condition God required of Abraham and all his descendants in order that they have the right to God's covenant promise to the Land. If they were not circumcised, they would be cut off from God's people, and they could have no claim to any portion of the covenant. When Joshua had circumcised all the male children of Israel, they all rested in their camps. The LORD told Joshua that "this have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt

from off you" (v.9). This was the reason they named the place of their encampment "Gilgal" which means "a rolling or to roll away". Israel was now re-established as the covenant people of God, and no more subjected to the ridicule and enslavement, which they once suffered in Egypt. They now lived as God's people in the land God had promised them, a free people and enjoying the land that "floweth with milk and honey". The past life of slavery is over. Their sins and old life has been rolled away. They are now in the Land of Promise.

#### **The Celebration – 5:10-11**

Four days later, on the fourteenth day of the same month, they celebrated the Passover feast in the evening, in the plains of Jericho. One can be sure that "the wilderness generation" would ask their fathers what was the significance of the Passover. Their fathers would be too happy to tell them. The first Passover was celebrated in Egypt where it was first instituted. On the night that they observed the Passover, a lamb without blemish and a male of the first year was slaughtered and its blood marked on the door-posts and the lintels of their houses. That night, the LORD smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh to the first-born of the captive in the dungeon. Every family whose house was not marked with the blood

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<sup>5</sup>Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Romans 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

of the Passover lamb met with the death of their first born son. It was a sad and sorrowful day for many Egyptians; and this forced Pharaoh to set the Israelites free from slavery and send them away from Egypt (Exodus 12).

The second time they kept the Passover was at Mount Sinai when God had given His Law to Moses (Numbers 9:1-5). This time at Gilgal was their third. They had already been circumcised and now marked as a people belonging to God. They could partake in the celebration of the Passover as God's covenant people. Today the Jews continue to celebrate the Passover commemorating the freedom from bondage in Egypt about three thousand five hundred years before! The week following the day of the Passover, they observed the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. They made and ate the unleavened bread from the produce of the land.

#### **Manna Ceased – 5:12**

As soon as they had observed the Passover, the daily provision of manna for the past forty years stopped. It ceased miraculously just as it was given miraculously. They were now in the Land which God had promised them. It was "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and

pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey" (Deuteronomy 8:7-8). There would be no scarcity of bread, and the Israelites would be able to eat and be full and they would bless the LORD their God for the good land which He had given them. The wandering years in the wilderness was a time of learning for them to live by faith daily and obey the commandments of God implicitly. From now onwards, they could eat of "the fruit of the land of Canaan" but the same lessons remain.

#### **The Encounter – 5:13-15**

Joshua was standing alone by the fortified city of Jericho. Perhaps, racing through his mind was the task of having to lead the children of Israel to conquer the Land. There was no turning back. The die has been cast! Although the LORD God had promised them the Land, yet Israel must do their part. When he lifted his eyes and looked in the direction of Jericho, he suddenly saw "a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand" (v.13). Joshua straightaway confronted him: "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" The answer from the "man" was a simple "Nay". The "man" then identified himself as "the captain of the host of the LORD". Then Joshua fell on his face to the ground and worshipped Him.

The fact that the "man" accepted Joshua's worship of Him

indicated that He was God. He could not be an angel because a good angel would not accept any worship.<sup>6</sup> This affirmed that it was a pre-incarnate appearance of the LORD Jesus Christ to Joshua. Then He told Joshua to take off His shoes for the place where he was standing was holy. This further removed all doubts regarding the true identity of the “man”. The same instruction was given when God appeared to Moses at the burning bush. He told Moses to “put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). This visible appearance of the LORD in human form is understood as a “Theophany”<sup>7</sup>.

The LORD appeared to Him “as the captain of the host”. The word “host” was definitely not a reference to the army of Israel, but to the multitude of angels who were at the LORD’S bidding.<sup>8</sup> If Joshua was thinking of

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<sup>6</sup> Revelation 22:8 And I John saw these things, and heard *them*. And when I had heard and seen, **I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel** which shewed me these things. <sup>9</sup> Then saith he unto me, **See *thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant***, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: **worship God.**

<sup>7</sup> “Theophany”: Greek word, “theo” means “God” and “phaneros” [phany] means “visible, clear”. Since God the Father is Spirit, this visible appearance of God was identified as “Christophany” – the preincarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 26:53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

having to lead the armies of Israel to battle, the LORD was telling him that the battle was the LORD’S and not his. The drawn sword indicated that God was going along to fight for Joshua and Israel. The LORD was ready for battle! Is Joshua ready to lead?

It is therefore understandable why the LORD answered “Nay” to Joshua’s question to Him. The LORD God is not a Person at the disposal of man “to get Him on our side” or “to get Him to do our will.” He is free and sovereign and acts as He wills. The battle Joshua envisaged must be subordinated to God’s overall plan and purpose for the nation Israel and for the whole earth. Joshua understood rightly when he asked: “What saith my lord (Hebrew, *adonai*) unto his servant?” (v.14).<sup>9</sup> This special appearance of God was necessary to prepare Joshua for the challenging and difficult work ahead. How understanding and caring is the LORD God Almighty!

### PRACTICAL VALUE

One important lesson we learn from this relatively short chapter concerns the covenant-promise of God which He made with Abraham and the children of Israel. The

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<sup>9</sup> E. John Hamlin, *Joshua*, p.40

covenant-promise which God made with Abraham was marked by the rite of circumcision. That covenant-promise which God made with Abraham includes all those of other nations as long as they exercised faith and believe.<sup>10</sup> In the New Testament, God's covenant-promise made to Abraham and his descendents is also extended to all nations as long as they believe and receive God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ as their LORD and Saviour (Ephesians 2:11-13, 19): *Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. . . . Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow*

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 17:2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, 4 As for me, behold, **my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.** {many...: Heb. multitude of nations} 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. {Abraham: that is, Father of a great multitude}

*citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.* This new-covenant is an extension and culmination of the covenant-promise which God made with Abraham to include all nations.

Circumcision in the Old Testament as a sign of the covenant-promise, which God made with Abraham and the children of Israel, is compared with water baptism as the sign of the new-covenant community of Christians. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to make disciples and "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Peter, having preached to the multitude, called on them to "repent and be baptized" every one of them in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and for receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). In writing to the Christians in Colossae, Paul compares baptism with circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12): *In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

In the covenant-promise, which God made with Abraham and his descendents with the mark of circumcision, Israel is ensured of

national and natural blessings from God. The LORD is their God; they are “a special people” unto God above all other people on earth; God sets His love upon them; God would bless them, multiply them, increase their substance in the Promised Land, and they shall not be afraid of all the other nations (Deuteronomy 7). In addition, no other nation has such great “statutes and judgments so righteous as this law” which the LORD God had given them (Deuteronomy 4:8). Similarly, Christians, who belong to the new-covenant community marked with baptism, are blessed with communal and natural blessings. We have the LORD, the living and true God, our God; the possession and access to the infallible, inerrant and authoritative Word of God; the fellowship and care of believers. Our infant children, who are baptized in accordance with the command of God, are also blessed. Of course, there is the spiritual understanding to this baptism. Having access to all these blessings, they grow up and must have the baptism of the heart by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We learn that only after the Israelites were circumcised could they participate in celebrating the Passover. The Passover has its parallel in the Lord’s Supper where Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). He is without sin, and He died for the atonement of our sins, and

the sins of the world that whosoever repents and believes in Him shall not perish but the remission of sins and the gift of eternal life. The Lord’s Supper, instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ, before His crucifixion and death, was intended to remind all His disciples to celebrate and to remember His redemptive work of salvation. Therefore, whenever we partake of the “Bread and Wine” in the Lord’s Supper, we remember His death and resurrection, and His coming back to take us all to be with Him. If we do not have the baptism of the heart, we would have no part in the Lord’s Supper.

Finally, our Christian life is a spiritual warfare, as Paul describes it: “for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). The LORD is our “Captain”, and let us submit to Him for the battle is His and only in Him can we be victorious. So, worship Him and Him only. AMEN



**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Joshua 5:1-9; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26.

**TUESDAY:** Joshua 5:1-9; Genesis 17:9-14; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:11-13.

**WEDNESDAY:** Joshua 5:1-15; 1 Corinthians 5:7-11.

**THURSDAY:** Joshua 5:1-15; Deuteronomy 8:2-10.

**FRIDAY:** Joshua 5:1-15; 2 Kings 6:13-18.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How are you affected by the knowledge of the might of your enemies in comparison to your knowledge of God? Which kind of knowledge is superior? Explain your answer.

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2. Circumcision and the celebration of the Passover are outward signs of the covenant between God and Israel. What are their equivalents in the New Testament? Describe their similarities and differences.

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3. Outward signs of a relationship with God may be a hindrance to or a help in our witness to the world. How are they so? Explain.

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4. What significance would the Passover have for those who had just crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land?

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5. What can you say about the manna in the history of God's people?

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6. The personal significance for Joshua of his encounter with the commander of the Lord's army:

i. How important was this experience for Joshua at this time?

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ii. Who was this man?

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iii. Why was the sword drawn?

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iv. Who do you think the "host" of verse 14 was?

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v. What was the purpose of the command in verse 15?

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