

CHAPTER 5

Israel have now got over Jordan, and the waters which had opened before them, to favour their march forward, are closed again behind them, to forbid their retreat backward. They have now got footing in Canaan, and must apply themselves to the conquest of it, in order to which this chapter tells us,

- I. How their enemies were dispirited (v. 1).
- II. What was done at their first landing to assist and encourage them.
 1. The covenant of circumcision was renewed (v. 2-9).
 2. The feast of the passover was celebrated (v. 10).
 3. Their camp was victualled with the corn of the land, whereupon the manna ceased (v. 11, 12).
 4. The captain of the Lord's host himself appeared to Joshua to animate and direct him (v. 13-15).

◀OFF▶ JOSHUA 5:1-9

THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE ISRAELITES

A vast show, no doubt, the numerous camp of Israel made in the plains of Jericho, where now they had pitched their tents. *Who can count the dust of Jacob?* That which had long been the *church in the wilderness* has now come up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved, and looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. How terrible she was in the eyes of her enemies we are here told, v. 1. How fair and clear she was made in the eyes of her friends, by the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt, we are told in the following verses.

I. Here is the fright which the Canaanites were put into by their miraculously passing over Jordan, v. 1. The news of it was soon dispersed all the country over, not only as a prodigy in itself, but as an alarm to all the kings and kingdoms of Canaan. Now, as when Babylon was taken, *One post runs to meet another, and one messenger to meet another*, to carry

the amazing tidings to every corner of their land, ^{<251>}Jeremiah 51:31. And here we are told what impressions the tidings made upon the kings of this land: *Their heart melted* like wax before the fire, *neither was there spirit in them any more*. This intimates that, though the heart of the people generally had fainted before (as Rahab owned, ^{<411>}Joshua 2:9), yet the kings had till now kept up their spirits pretty well, had promised themselves that, being in possession, their country populous, and their cities fortified, they should be able to make their part good against the invaders; but when they heard not only that they had come over Jordan, and that this defence of their country was broken through, but that they had come over by a miracle, the God of nature manifestly fighting for them, *their hearts failed them* too, they gave up the cause for gone, and were now at their wits' end. And,

1. they had reason enough to be afraid; Israel itself was a formidable body, and much more so when God was its head, a God of almighty power. What can make head against them if Jordan be driven back before them?

2. God impressed these fears upon them, and dispirited them, as he had promised (^{<1237>}Exodus 23:27), *I will send my fear before thee*. God can make the wicked to fear *where no fear is* (^{<1515>}Psalms 53:5.), much more where there is such cause for fear as was here. He that made the soul can, when he pleases, make his sword thus to approach to it and kill it with his terrors.

II. The opportunity which this gave to the Israelites to circumcise those among them that were uncircumcised: *At that time* (v. 2), when the country about them was in that great consternation, God ordered Joshua to circumcise the children of Israel, for at that time it might be done with safety even in an enemy's country; their hearts being melted, their hands were tied, that they could not take this advantage against them as Simeon and Levi did against the Shechemites, to come upon them *when they were sore*. Joshua could not be sure of this, and therefore, if he had ordered this general circumcision just at this time of his own head, he might justly have been censured as imprudent; for, how good soever the thing was in itself, in the eye of reason it was not seasonable at this time, and might have been of dangerous consequence; but, when God commanded him to do it, he must not *consult with flesh and blood*; he that bade them to do it would, no doubt, protect them and bear them out in it. Now observe,

1. The occasion there was for this general circumcision.

(1.) All that came out of Egypt were circumcised, v. 5. while they had peace in Egypt doubtless they circumcised their children the eighth day according to the law. But after they began to be oppressed, especially when the edict was made for the destruction of their male infants, the administration of this ordinance was interrupted; many of them were uncircumcised, of whom there was a general circumcision, either during the time of the three days' darkness, as Dr. Lightfoot conjectures, or a year after, just before their eating the second passover at Mount Sinai, and in order to that solemnity (^{<0170>}Numbers 9:2) as many think. And it is with reference to that general circumcision that this is called a *second*, v. 2. But the learned Masius thinks it refers to the general circumcision of Abraham's family when that ordinance was first instituted, ^{<0173>}Genesis 17:23. That first confirmed the promise of the land of Canaan, this second was a thankful celebration of the performance of that promise. But,

(2.) All that were *born in the wilderness*, namely, after their walking in the wilderness, became by the divine sentence a judgment upon them for their disobedience, as is intimated by that repetition of the sentence, v. 6. All that were born since that fatal day on which God swore in his wrath that none of that generation should *enter into his rest* were uncircumcised. But what shall we say to this? Had not God enjoined it to Abraham, under a very severe penalty, that every man-child of his seed should be circumcised on the eighth day? ^{<0179>}Genesis 17:9-14. Was it not the seal of the everlasting covenant? Was not so great a stress laid upon it when they were coming out of Egypt that when, immediately after the first passover, the law concerning that feast was made perpetual, this was one clause of it, that no uncircumcised person should eat of it, but should be deemed as a stranger? and yet, under the government of Moses himself, to have all their children that were born for thirty-eight years together left uncircumcised is unaccountable. So great an omission could not be general but by divine direction. Now,

[1.] Some think circumcision was omitted because it was needless: it was appointed to be a mark of distinction between the Israelites and other nations, and therefore in the wilderness, where they were so perfectly separated from all and mingled with none, there was no occasion for it.

[2.] Others think that they did not look upon the precept of circumcision as obligatory till they came to settle in Canaan; for in the covenant made with

them at Mount Sinai nothing was said about circumcision, neither was it of Moses but of *the fathers* (^{<4022>}John 7:22), and with particular reference to the grant of the land of Canaan, ^{<0108>}Genesis 17:8.

[3.] Others think that God favourably dispensed with the observance of this ordinance in consideration of the unsettledness of their state, and their frequent removals while they were in the wilderness. It was requisite that children after they were circumcised should rest for some time while they were sore, and stirring them might be dangerous to them; God therefore would have mercy and not sacrifice. This reason is generally acquiesced in, but to me it is not satisfactory, for sometimes they staid a year in a place (^{<0402>}Numbers 9:22), if not much longer, and in their removals the little children, though sore, might be wrapped so warm, and carried so easy, as to receive no damage, and might certainly be much better accommodated than the mothers in travail or while lying in. Therefore,

[4.] To me it seems to have been a continued token of God's displeasure against them for their unbelief and murmuring. Circumcision was originally a seal of the promise of the land of Canaan, as we observed before. It was in the believing hope of that good land that the patriarchs circumcised their children; but when God had *sworn in his wrath* concerning the men of was who came out of Egypt that they should be consumed in the wilderness, and never enter Canaan, nor come within sight of it (as that sentence is here repeated, v. 6, reference being made to it), as a further ratification of that sentence, and to be a constant memorandum of it to them, all that fell under that sentence, and were to fall by it, were forbidden to circumcise their children, by which they were plainly told that, whatever others might, they should never have the benefit of that promise of which circumcision was the seal. And this was such a significant indication of God's wrath as the breaking of the tables of the covenant was when Israel had broken the covenant by making the golden calf. It is true that there is no express mention of this judicial prohibition in the account of that sentence; but an intimation of it in ^{<0443>}Numbers 14:33, *Your children shall bear your whoredoms*. It is probable the children of Caleb and Joshua were circumcised, for they were excepted out of that sentence, and of Caleb it is particularly said, *To him will I give the land, and to his children* (^{<0016>}Deuteronomy 1:36), which was the very promise that circumcision was the seal of: and Joshua is here told to circumcise the people, not his own family. Whatever the reason was, it seems that this great ordinance was omitted in Israel for almost forty years together, which is a plain indication

that it was not of absolute necessity, nor was to be of perpetual obligation, but should in the fulness of time be abolished, as now it was for so long a time suspended.

2. The orders given to Joshua for this general circumcision (v. 2): *Circumcise again the children of Israel*, not the same person, but the body of the people. Why was this ordered to be done now? Answ.

(1.) Because now the promise of which circumcision was instituted to be the seal was performed. The seed of Israel was brought safely into the land of Canaan. "Let them therefore hereby own the truth of that promise which their fathers had disbelieved, and could not find in their hearts to trust to."

(2.) Because now the threatening of which the suspending of circumcision for thirty-eight years was the ratification was fully executed by the expiring of the forty years. That *warfare is accomplished, that iniquity is pardoned* (²⁴⁰Isaiah 40:2), and therefore now the seal of the covenant is revived again. But why was it not done sooner? why not while they were resting some months in the plains of Moab? why not during the thirty days of their mourning for Moses? Why was it not deferred longer, till they had made some progress in the conquest of Canaan, and had gained a settlement there, at least till they had entrenched themselves, and fortified their camp? why must it be done the very next day after they had come over Jordan? Answ. Because divine Wisdom saw that to be the fittest time, just when the forty years were ended, and they had entered Canaan; and the reasons which human wisdom would have offered against it were easily overruled.

[1.] God would hereby show that the camp of Israel was not governed by the ordinary rules and measures of war, but by immediate direction from God, who by thus exposing them, in the most dangerous moments, magnified his own power in protecting them even then. And this great instance of security, in disabling themselves for action just when they were entering upon action, proclaimed such confidence in the divine care for their safety as would increase their enemies' fears, much more when their scouts informed them not only of the thing itself that was done, but of the meaning of it, that it was a seal of the grant of this land to Israel.

[2.] God would hereby animate his people Israel against the difficulties they were now to encounter, by confirming his covenant with them, which gave them unquestionable assurance of victory and success, and the full possession of the land of promise.

[3.] God would hereby teach them, and us with them, in all great undertakings to *begin with God*, to make sure of his favour, by offering ourselves to him *a living sacrifice* (for that was signified by the blood of circumcision), and then we may expect to prosper in all we do.

[4.] The reviving of circumcision, after it had been so long disused, was designed to revive the observance of other institutions, the omission of which had been connived at in the wilderness. This command to circumcise them was to remind them of that which Moses had told them (^{<R1B>}Deuteronomy 21:8), that when they should have come *over Jordan* they must not do as they had done *in the wilderness*, but must come under a stricter discipline. It was said concerning many of the laws God had given them that they must observe them *in the land* to which they were going, ^{<R1D>}Deuteronomy 6:1; 12:1.

[5.] This *second* circumcision, as it is here called, was typical of the spiritual circumcision with which the Israel of God, when they enter into the gospel rest, are circumcised; it is the learned bishop Pierson's observation that this circumcision being performed under the direction of Joshua, Moses' successor, it points to *Jesus as the true circumciser*, the author of *another circumcision* than that *of the flesh*, commanded by the law, even the *circumcision of the heart* (^{<R1D>}Romans 2:29), called the *circumcision of Christ*, ^{<S1D>}Colossians 2:11.

3. The people's obedience to these orders. Joshua *circumcised the children of Israel* (v. 3), not himself with his own hands, but he commanded that it should be done, and took care that it was done: it might soon be despatched, for it was not necessary that it should be done by a priest or Levite, but any one might be employed to do it. All those that were under twenty years old when the people were numbered at Mount Sinai, and not being numbered with them fell not by the fatal sentence, were circumcised, and by them all the rest might be circumcised in a little time. The people had promised to hearken to Joshua as they had hearkened to Moses (^{<R1D>}Joshua 1:17), and here they gave an instance of their dutifulness by submitting to this painful institution, and not calling him for the sake of it a bloody governor, as Zipporah because of the circumcision called Moses a bloody husband.

4. The names given to the place where this was done, to perpetuate the memory of it.

(1.) It was called *the hill of the foreskins*, v. 3. Probably the foreskins that were cut off were laid on a heap, and covered with earth, so that they made a little hillock.

(2.) It was called *Gilgal*, from a word which signifies to take away, from that which God said to Joshua (v. 9), *This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt*. God is jealous for the honour of his people, his own honour being so much interested in it; and, whatever reproach they may lie under for a time, first or last it will certainly be rolled away, and every tongue that riseth up against them he will condemn.

[1.] Their circumcision rolled away the reproach of Egypt. they were hereby owned to be the free-born children of God, having the seal of the covenant in their flesh, and so the reproach of their bondage in Egypt was removed. They were tainted with the idolatry of Egypt, and that was their reproach; but now that they were circumcised it was to be hoped they would be so entirely devoted to God that the reproach of their affection to Egypt would be rolled away.

[2.] Their coming safely to Canaan rolled away the reproach of Egypt, for it silenced that spiteful suggestion of the Egyptians, that *for mischief they were brought out, the wilderness had shut them in*, ^{<1248>}Exodus 14:3. Their wandering so long in the wilderness confirmed the reproach, but now that they had entered Canaan in triumph that reproach was done away. When God glorifies himself in perfecting the salvation of his people he not only silences the reproach of their enemies, but rolls it upon themselves.

^{<1150>}JOSHUA 5:10-12

THE CEASING OF THE MANNA

We may well imagine that the people of Canaan were astonished, and that when they observed the motions of the enemy they could not but think them very strange. When soldiers take the field they are apt to think themselves excused from religious exercises (they have not time nor thought to attend to them), yet Joshua opens the campaign with one act of devotion after another. What was afterwards said to another Joshua might truly be said to this, *Hear now, O Joshua! thou and thy fellows that sit before thee are men wondered at* (^{<388>}Zechariah 3:8), and yet indeed he

took the right method. that is likely to end well which begins with God. Here is,

I. A solemn passover kept, at the time appointed by the law, *the fourteenth day of the first month*, and in the same place where they were circumcised, v. 10. While they were wandering in the wilderness they were denied the benefit and comfort of this ordinance, as a further token of God's displeasure; but now, in answer to the prayer of Moses upon the passing of that sentence ^{<19015>}Psalm 90:15, God comforted them again, after the time that he had afflicted them, and therefore now that joyful ordinance is revived again. Now that they had entered into Canaan it was very seasonable to remember those wondrous works of divine power and goodness by which they were brought out of Egypt. The finishing of mercies should bring to mind the beginning of them; and when it is perfect day we must not forget how welcome the morning-light was when we had long waited for it. The solemn passover followed immediately after the solemn circumcision; thus, when those that received the word were baptized, immediately we find them *breaking bread*, ^{<4181>}Acts 2:41, 42. They kept this passover in the plains of Jericho, as it were in defiance of the Canaanites that were round about them and enraged against them, and yet could not give them any disturbance. Thus God gave them an early instance of the performance of that promise that when they went up to keep the feasts their land should be taken under the special protection of the divine Providence. ^{<1381>}Exodus 34:24, *Neither shall any man desire thy land.* He now *prepared a table before them in the presence of their enemies*, ^{<1315>}Psalm 23:5.

II. Provision made for their camp of the *corn of the land*, and the *ceasing of the manna* thereupon, v. 11, 12. Manna was a wonderful mercy to them when they needed it. But it was the mark of a wilderness state; it was the food of children; and therefore, though it was angel's food, and not to be complained of a light bread, yet it would be more acceptable to them to eat of the *corn of the land*, and this they are now furnished with.

1. The country people, having retired for safety into Jericho, had left their barns and fields, and all that was in them, which served for the subsistence of this great army. And the supply came very seasonably, for,

(1.) After the passover they were to keep *the feast of unleavened bread*, which they could not do according to the appointment when they had

nothing but manna to live upon; and perhaps this was one reason why it was intermitted in the wilderness. But now they found old corn enough in the barns of the Canaanites to supply them plentifully for that occasion; thus *the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*, and little did those who laid it up think *whose all these things should be which they had provided*.

(2.) On the morrow after the passover-sabbath they were to *wave the sheaf of first-fruits before the Lord*, ^{<RE30>}Leviticus 23:10, 11. And this they were particularly ordered to do when they *came into the land which God would give them*: and they were furnished for this with the *fruit of the land that year* (v. 12), which was then growing and beginning to be ripe. Thus they were well provided for, both with *old and new corn, as good householders*. See ^{<DI52>}Matthew 13:52. And as soon as ever the fruits of this good land came to their hands they had an opportunity of honouring God with them, and employing them in his service according to his appointment. And thus, *behold, all things were clean and comfortable to them*. Calvin is of opinion that they had kept the passover every year in its season during their wandering in the wilderness, though it is not mentioned, and that God dispensed with their being uncircumcised, as he did, notwithstanding that, admit them to offer other sacrifices. but some gather from ^{<SI55>}Amos 5:25 that after the sentence passed upon them there were no sacrifices offered till they came to Canaan, and consequently no passover was kept. And it is observable that after that sentence (Numbers 14) the law which follows (Numbers 15) concerning sacrifices begins thus: "*When you shall have come into the land of your habitations*" you shall do so and so.

2. Notice is taken of the ceasing of the manna as soon as ever they had eaten the *old corn of the land*,

(1.) To show that it did not come by chance or common providence, as snow or hail does, but by the special designation of divine wisdom and goodness; for, as it came just when they needed it, so it continued as long as they had occasion for it and no longer.

(2.) To teach us not to expect extraordinary supplies when supplies may be had in an ordinary way. If God had dealt with Israel according to their deserts, the manna would have ceased when they called it light bread; but as long as they needed it God continued it, though they despised it; and now that they needed it not God withdrew it, though perhaps some of them desired it. He is a wise Father, who knows the necessities of his children,

and accommodates his gifts to *them*, not to their humours. The word and ordinances of God are spiritual manna, with which God nourishes his people in this wilderness, and, though often forfeited, yet they are continued while we are here; but when we come to the heavenly Canaan this manna will cease, for we shall no longer have need of it.

<HEB> JOSHUA 5:13-15

THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

We have hitherto found God often speaking to Joshua, but we read not till now of any appearance of God's glory to him; now that his difficulties increased his encouragements were increased in proportion. Observe,

I. The time when he was favoured with this vision. It was immediately after he had performed the great solemnities of circumcision and the passover; then God made himself known to him. Note, We may then expect the discoveries of the divine grace when we are found in the way of our duty and are diligent and sincere in our attendance on holy ordinances.

II. The place where he had this vision. It was *by Jericho; in Jericho*, so the word is; in it by faith and hope, though as yet he had not begun to lay siege to it; in it in thought and expectation; or in the fields of Jericho, hard by the city. There, it should seem, he was all alone, fearless of danger, because sure of the divine protection. There he was (some think) meditating and praying; and to those who are so employed God often graciously manifests himself. Or perhaps there he was to take a view of the city, to observe its fortifications, and contrive how to attack it; and perhaps he was at a loss within himself how to make his approaches, when God came and directed him. Note, God will *help those that help themselves*. *Vigilantibus non dormientibus succurrit lex* — *The law succours those who watch, not those who sleep*. Joshua was in his post as a general, when God came and made himself known as Generalissimo.

III. The appearance itself. Joshua, as is usual with those that are full of thought and care, was looking downwards, his eyes fixed on the ground, when of a sudden he was surprised with the appearance of a man who stood before him at some little distance, which obliged him to lift up his

eyes, and gave a diversion to his musings, v. 13. He appeared to him as a man, but a considerable man, and one fit to be taken notice of. Now,

1. We have reason to think that this man was the Son of God, the eternal Word, who, before he assumed the human nature for a perpetuity, frequently appeared in a human shape. So bishop Patrick thinks, consonant to the judgment of the fathers. Joshua gave him divine honours, and he received them, which a created angel would not have done, and he is called *Jehovah*, ^{<188E>}Joshua 6:2.

2. He here appeared as a soldier, with *his sword drawn in his hand*. To Abraham in his tent he appeared as a traveller; to Joshua in the field as a man of war. Christ will be to his people what their faith expects and desires. Christ had his sword drawn, which served,

(1.) To justify the war Joshua was engaging in, and to show him that it was of God, who gave him commission to kill and slay. If the sovereign draw the sword, this proclaims war, and authorizes the subject to do so too. The sword is then well drawn when Christ *draws it, and gives the banner to those that fear him, to be displayed because of the truth*, ^{<390E>}Psalm 60:4.

(2.) To encourage him to carry it on with vigour; for Christ's sword drawn in his hand denotes how ready he is for the defence and salvation of his people, who through him shall do valiantly. His sword turns every way.

IV. The bold question with which Joshua accosted him; he did not send a servant, but stepped up to him himself, and asked, *Art thou for us or for our adversaries?* which intimates his readiness to entertain him if he were for them, and to fight him if he were against them. This shows,

1. His great courage and resolution. He was not ruffled by the suddenness of the appearance, nor daunted with the majesty and bravery which no doubt appeared in the countenance of the person he saw; but, with a presence of mind that became so great a general, put this fair question to him. God had bidden Joshua be courageous, and by this it appears that he was so; for what God by his word requires of his people he does by his grace work in them.

2. His great concern for the people and their cause; so heartily has he embarked in the interests of Israel that none shall stand by him with the face of a man but he will know whether he be a friend or a foe. It should seem, he suspected him for an enemy, a Goliath that had come to *defy the*

armies of the living God, and to give him a challenge. Thus apt are we to look upon that as against us which is most for us. The question plainly implies that the cause between the Israelites and the Canaanites, between Christ and Beelzebub, will not admit of a neutrality. *He that is not with us is against us.*

V. The account he gave of himself, v. 14. “Nay, not for your adversaries, you may be sure, but *as captain of the host of the Lord have I now come*, not only for you as a friend, but over you as commander in chief.” Here were now, as of old (^{<0332>}Genesis 32:2), *Mahanaim, two hosts*, a host of Israelites ready to engage the Canaanites and a host of angels to protect them therein, and he, as captain of both, conducts the host of Israel and commands the host of angels to their assistance. Perhaps in allusion to this Christ is called the *captain of our salvation* (^{<8210>}Hebrews 2:10), *and a leader and commander to the people*, ^{<2574>}Isaiah 55:4. Those cannot but be victorious that have such a captain. He now came as captain to review the troops, to animate them, and to give the necessary orders for the besieging of Jericho.

VI. The great respect Joshua paid him when he understood who he was; it is probable that he perceived, not only by what he said but by some other sensible indications, that he was a divine person, and not a man.

1. Joshua paid homage to him: He *fell on his face to the earth and did worship*. Joshua was himself general of the forces of Israel, and yet he was far from looking with jealousy upon this stranger, who produced a commission as captain of the Lord's host above him; he did not offer to dispute his claims, but cheerfully submitted to him as his commander. It will become the greatest of men to be humble and reverent in their addresses to God.

2. He begged to receive commands and directions from him: *What saith my Lord unto his servant?* His former question was not more bold and soldier-like than this was pious and saint-like; nor was it any disparagement to the greatness of Joshua's spirit thus to humble himself when he had to do with God: even crowned heads cannot bow to low before the throne of the Lord Jesus, who is *King of kings*, ^{<8210>}Psalm 2:10,11; 72:10, 11; ^{<6916>}Revelation 19:16. Observe,

(1.) The relation he owns between himself and Christ, that Christ was his Lord and himself his servant and under his command, Christ his Captain

and himself a soldier under him, to do as he is bidden, ^{<OR>}Matthew 8:9. Note, The foundation of all acceptable obedience is laid in a sincere dedication of ourselves, as servants to Jesus Christ as *our Lord*, ^{<OR>}Psalms 16:2.

(2.) The enquiry he makes pursuant to this relation: *What saith my Lord?* which implies an earnest desire to know the will of Christ, and a cheerful readiness and resolution to do it. Joshua owns himself an inferior officer, and stands to receive orders. This temper of mind shows him fit for the post he was in; for those know best how to command that know how to obey.

VII. The further expressions of reverence which this divine captain required from Joshua (v. 15): *Loose thy shoe from off thy foot*, in token of reverence and respect (which with us are signified by uncovering the head), and as an acknowledgment of a divine presence, which, while it continued there, did in a manner sanctify the place and dignify it. We are accustomed to say of a person for whom we have a great affection that we love the very ground he treads upon; thus Joshua must show his reverence for this divine person, he must not tread the ground he stood on with his dirty shoes, ^{<OR>}Ecclesiastes 5:1. Outward expressions of inward reverence, and a religious awe of God, well become us, and are required of us, whenever we approach to him in solemn ordinances. Bishop Patrick well observes here that the very same orders that God gave to Moses at the bush, when he was sending him to bring Israel out of Egypt (^{<OR>}Exodus 3:5), he here gives to Joshua, for the confirming of his faith in the promise he had lately given him, that as he had been with Moses so he would be with him, ^{<OR>}Joshua 1:5. Had Moses such a presence of God with him as, when it became sensible, sanctified the ground? So had Joshua.

And (*lastly*) Hereby he prepares him to receive the instructions he was about to give him concerning the siege of Jericho, which this captain of the Lord's host had now come to give Israel possession of.