

JOSHUA

Lesson 7 - Chapter 5

We concluded our study of the 4th chapter of Joshua last week by reading the 1st verse of the 5th chapter that explained that as a result of Israel being obedient to the Lord, the land of Canaan was already handed over to them. Further Yehoveh (in His infinitely mysterious ways that man will never be able to fathom) had established in the minds of the Canaanites and Amorites that it was just a matter of time before they were defeated and destroyed by God's army; therefore the current residents of the land that God promised to Abraham were sent spiraling into the depths of depression.

I also mentioned last week (and the week before) that as we worked our way through Joshua and then Judges we were going to witness commands, laws, and principles ordained in the Torah play out. However at times it would be easy to overlook them because of the English translations of the original Hebrew, and because this story was meant to be spoken by a storyteller to his audience rather than read as text. Therefore not only are the Scriptural words translated from Hebrew to English, so is the style changed from one that was originally created for oral transmission to one this is meant for silent reading and personal study.

Chapter 5 is full to the brim with divine principles and spiritual meaning that we're going to take the time to explore.

Let's read Joshua chapter 5 together.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 5 all

Although the Lord has gone to great length to establish Joshua's divinely appointed authority over Israel, we must recognize and put to memory that Joshua was not given the same status as Moses. Moses was God's Mediator as was Yeshua; they're the ONLY 2 Mediators of their order in history, and as far as we know from Scripture they are the only 2 who will ever exist. What distinguishes Jesus and Moses from all other men who were at times given the title of mediator is that they were appointed to hand down God's laws and commands to mankind. We'll find that Joshua is at times called Israel's mediator, and some times the High Priest is called Israel's mediator, and even the regular priests are on a couple of occasions referred to as mediators. But none of these spoke to God face-to-face, and none of these established God's heavenly laws on Earth, as did Messiah Yeshua and Moses. At best these various Old Testament leaders had the authority to teach the laws established by Moses and to enforce the commands given on Mt. Sinai and in Moab.

Even the great prophets that would come later like Samuel, Isaiah, Zechariah, and Daniel did NOT bring NEW laws and commands nor declare established laws void. Everything they presented to Israel were revelations of God's plans and instructions for Israel to scrupulously follow God's already long-established laws; and often those divine instructions involved threats of what would happen to Israel if they kept on their path of disobedience to those laws.

Therefore as we move forward through Joshua, Judges, and other books of the Old Testament keep this perspective firmly in the front of your mind: that NO NEW LAWS would be added, and NO PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED LAWS would be abolished because the only 2 people ever given the authority to do such a thing were Moses and Jesus. In fact even angels or other divine spirit beings were not given the authority to modify the Law.

Since the first Mediator, Moses, was dead before Joshua took command and it would be 1300 years before God would establish the next Mediator (Jesus) therefore we can confidently close our Bibles at the last words of Ezra knowing that the Lord never authorized a change in His Law.

So as we enter the New Testament era the same laws that Moses established remained intact. But what about when the NEW Mediator, Messiah Jesus, arrived? Indeed Yeshua DID have the inherent authority as God's Mediator to establish new laws and abolish old ones since not only was He God's Mediator He was actually God Himself. Of course, just as Moses only acted in God's direct will so Yeshua did the same and made it clear that it was the Father's will that was being done in every case and not His own.

So here's the \$64,000 question: **did** Jesus add laws or subtract laws or change laws that Moses enacted on God's behalf? Did Yeshua undo some or all of what the previous Mediator, Moses, had established? Well Jesus decided to answer that question Himself and directly, without the aid of disciples or Apostles, so that there would be no doubt.

CJB Matthew 5:17 "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. 18 Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. 19 So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now since some of you may object at times to my use of the Complete Jewish Bible for our studies, here is that same passage in the KJV:

KJV Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

So according to Yeshua even though He had the authority as our Mediator to change, add, or abolish divine laws and commands **He didn't**. And Jesus followed that up with the dire warning that whomever said that He DID abolish the Law or the Prophets; or that He even changed the most minute detail concerning them, would be looked down upon by God and sent to the back of the line. But whoever tells others the truth that Jesus did NOT touch the Law but instead filled it full of its highest spiritual meaning would be held in highest esteem by the Creator.

Stay with me, now; I know most of you have heard me quote and teach on this passage many times but I'm about to give you some information that up to this point I've not talked about. I have already said to you that as we read through the Old Testament don't EVER think that God's prophets, or kings, or seers, or Judges, or High Priests or anyone else changed God's Law. If you ever read an Old Testament passage that SEEMS as though that might be the case, by definition it is impossible because God establishes His Laws ONLY through His 2 Mediators. Therefore what we must do at all times is to take all the instructions and directions issued to Israel and hold them up to light of the Law as given by Moses and written down in the Torah.

It's not unlike the absolutely correct Church understanding that however we might interpret His Word, and that whatever deed that we might do in God's name (as a step of obedience) it must be done within the context of loving the Lord with all our minds, soul and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves. If we believe anything or do anything in any other context then we can know immediately that we are outside of God's will because the Torah says that all the commandments and laws are built on that foundation, and Jesus repeats it for emphasis.

Let me say that again because it is so key to correctly understanding and applying Holy Scripture: if while studying the Old Testament we come upon a passage and think that perhaps an instruction or declaration said to have been issued by God through a prophet has just countermanded, added, or subtracted from the Law of Moses then we must discard that as a possibility and look at another interpretation because it is fundamentally impossible that anyone other than the Lord's 2 Mediators could do such a thing; and we know Moses' couldn't have countermanded any of his own commands any later than at Mt. Nebo in Moab because before Israel even entered the Promised Land he died there. Therefore whatever happens AFTER the book of Deuteronomy cannot and does not involve any fundamental change of the Law because until the advent of Yeshua 13 centuries later, no one else had the God-given authority. Are you with me?

OK. So how might this same principle apply to the New Testament? We just read in Matthew 5 that (during the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus made it clear that of all the things He DID come to do, it was not to change one iota of the Law; right? Apparently until at least heaven and earth passed away God would not do something unexpected like establish a 3rd Mediator nor would the Father perhaps instruct either a resurrected Moses or our returning Messiah Yeshua to change anything about the Law; right? And because heaven and earth didn't pass away while St. Paul and the writers of the New Testament walked the earth, and it still hasn't passed away to this day, then since Jesus ascended to the Father's right hand there has been no one with sufficient authority to change or abolish God's Law.

Now, as an aside, the Pope of the Catholic Church DOES claim the right to add, subtract, and change God's laws and commands but I reject that doctrine; not because he's a Catholic and I'm a Protestant but because Scripture never gives anyone other than Moses and Jesus the right to establish God's laws and commands upon mankind.

The modern Church (especially the Western Church) has been built far MORE on the writings of St. Paul than on Jesus' statements as recorded in the Gospels. And I'm not saying anything in that claim that a Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, Episcopal or any Christian theologian of most any denomination would disagree with; Paul is the NT author behind most Church doctrine and structure. But here's the thing; while everything that St. Paul (and all the other writers of the New Testament) said is indeed God's truth, NONE of them were given (or claimed) any authority to make changes to God's Law or commands. The problem is that many of Paul's writings have been interpreted in such a way as to be the basis for many in the Church to declare that the Law HAS changed or has even been abolished. I'm telling you that that is NOT what Paul ever meant to communicate, and we can be sure of that because Paul was not a Mediator and therefore he had no authority to change or abolish laws anymore than Joshua did.

Let me say that again: if, when reading the New Testament, you come across any statement by Paul, John, Peter or any other New Testament writer that seems to indicate that the Law has been changed or abolished then you need to discard that possibility and look for a different interpretation of their words. Otherwise you are denying the foundational theological principle that only God's 2 Mediators Moses and Jesus are the lawgivers. Either that or you have decided that Jesus' unambiguous statement in Matthew 5 (that He did NOT come to change the Law) is false, or that Paul has violated Jesus' command (saying that the law has changed or been abolished by Christ) and thus Paul's letters should be removed from our Bibles because they are in error.

So that you do not misunderstand what I'm saying: I do NOT think that Paul's letters are erroneous nor do I think they should they be removed from our Bibles because I have no doubts that they are accurate and true. What is erroneous are the interpretations made by agenda driven gentile church leaders who, since about 100 A.D. or so, WANT to find a means to declare the Law null and void or faulty in some way in order to divest the church from its Hebrew faith roots as a guillotine divests the body of its head. What is problematic is that by Church leadership declaring the Old Testament to be irrelevant for Christians then all of God's patterns and principles and laws and commands established there are annulled and can be manipulated and applied in an almost infinite number of directions. Or by declaring that the Torah is abolished (or saying it was nailed to the Cross, which is just another way of saying abolished) then all basis and foundation for interpreting and understanding the New Testament is lost. What is wrong is that the very same folks, who confidently pronounce that God never changes, believe that He DID change in a very dramatic way; He established the Law, declared it to be forever, and then in one bold stroke did away with it.

I'm here to tell you that NONE of that happened; that our God indeed does NOT change, and that I believe what Jesus said to be true. Paul is also dead-on right: Christ did things that the Law could not do. And that is because the Law was not designed to do them. Christ is for

justification and salvation; the Law is to show us what sin is, what pleases God, and how to live the righteous lifestyle of a saved person.

Joshua would lead the people of Israel based on the understanding that the Law of Moses was chiseled in stone and never to be tampered with. Some future leaders of Israel would go in another direction and be declared evil by the Lord BECAUSE they declared that their word overrode THE Word. Let's not accept such a thing from our Christian or Jewish leaders despite their lofty stature nor ever think that the Lord will show us a way different from what He has explicitly established in the Bible.

As with the one I just covered we've got a couple more great principles here in Joshua 5 that we're going to examine in depth. So let's move on.

With verse 2 Israel is now safely across the Jordan and camped at Gilgal just north of Jericho. The first thing Joshua orders is that all males be circumcised. This circumcision ceremony would have involved somewhere around 1 million or more Israelite men and boys. In fact a nickname was given to the place where this bloody ceremonial ritual must have gone on for a couple of days: Giv'at Ha'Aralot, which means "the hill of foreskins" (a very apt description I suspect).

We're told that the reason this mass B'rit Milah took place was that the former generation of the Exodus who had died in the Wilderness was the generation who had been circumcised, but this new generation (the ones entering the Promised Land) had NOT been circumcised during the Wilderness Journey. For whatever reason Moses had suspended the circumcisions during their travels (perhaps because of the pain and infection that was normal and customary with such an operation).

Why now for the B'rit Milah? Well it gets complicated because there is deep spiritual meaning behind it and it is a shadow and type for some significant New Testament happenings. First was the coming Passover; the Israelites were about to celebrate their first Pesach in the Promised Land and so especially the males had to be properly prepared for such a holy event. It was the parents of this generation who had received the Law AFTER they had been circumcised. Circumcision had been going on among the Hebrews since the time of Abraham because circumcision was the sign of acceptance of the Covenant of Abraham. With Moses at Mt. Sinai circumcision now also became a sign for acceptance of the Covenant of Moses. Since these Israelite males who had just crossed into Canaan were about to inherit the promise of land that was at the core of the Abrahamic Covenant, they HAD to be circumcised otherwise they had no right to participate in receiving the fruit of that promise.

Further Joshua had been carefully instructed that he is to be obedient to the Law (the Torah) and ensure that all Israel followed Torah in order for the Lord to bless all that lay ahead. Since the sign of personal acceptance of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants was circumcision it was essential that it be accomplished immediately as a first step of obedience.

But there was more. These Israelite males were to be God's Holy Warriors for His Holy War upon Canaan. ONLY those under God's covenants were eligible to participate in God's Holy

War; no foreigners or mercenaries could EVER be involved.

The 1st verse of this chapter explained that essentially the Canaanites huddled together shaking in their boots over Israel coming towards them. Under most any other circumstance one would have expected the armies of the various Canaanite and Amorite tribes and city-states to fiercely attack Israel immediately upon, are even during, their fording the Jordan. But just as the Lord God put a fear of dread into the Egyptians as one of the plagues, so the Lord put an immobilizing fear of Israel into the Canaanites. This accomplished 2 things: it enabled Israel to cross the Jordan unopposed, and it allowed the army the healing time necessary from the mass circumcision ceremony. The example in Genesis of the males of Shechem being circumcised and then the sons of Jacob attacking and killing all the men of Shechem due to their weakened condition gives us some idea of the serious repercussions of circumcision in that era. So there was great practicality involved in getting the B'rit Milah out of the way first thing before entering into combat.

Let's peel this onion back yet one more layer; it was essentially a 2nd circumcision that was required of Israel immediately after they crossed over the Jordan. The 1st circumcision happened long ago and it created Israel as a nation and a people, and it bonded them to the 2 covenants of Abraham and Moses as both individuals and as a whole congregation. But in order for Israel to enter the Promised Land and receive their inheritance a 2nd circumcision was needed. We find this principle brought forward into the New Covenant with Christ, and it is illustrated for us in Paul's Romans 11 expose that uses the Olive Tree metaphor that we're all familiar with.

You see every Jewish boy was circumcised on the 8th day after his birth. That circumcision ceremony signified his official inclusion into the people of Israel by means of his wearing the sign of the covenants of Abraham and Moses, the removal of his foreskin. Metaphorically speaking it was those circumcised Jews who formed the Olive Tree; or more simply put, the Olive Tree is Israel and the requirement to be part of Israel was circumcision (and it had been so since the time of Abraham). To be part of physical Israel one had to be circumcised, it all worked together.

However with the advent of Yeshua something transformed. In order to become part of what Paul calls "true or spiritual Israel" an additional act had to take place or a Jew would be as a branch broken off of that Olive Tree, and therefore no longer part of the tree. That "other act" was a 2nd circumcision, only now it had to be a circumcision of the heart. A circumcision of the heart was a metaphor for faith, trust, in God's son Jesus; it was a spiritual act.

Further just as ALL those of the Exodus generation who bore only the 1st circumcision died in the Wilderness and never entered into their rest, so do all Israelites who want to come to Yeshua have to die, spiritually speaking, to their old self if they want to enter their rest. Jews must have a 2nd circumcision (a circumcision of the heart) as a sign of their faith in Jesus in order to both remain a branch in the Olive Tree (the spiritual Olive Tree) and to inherit their final rest as a citizen of God's Kingdom.

Turn your Bibles to Romans chapter 2. If you have the CJB it is page 1403.

Let's start reading at Romans 2: 13 and we'll end with Romans 3:4.

READ ROMANS 2:13 – 3:4

Here we have it; there is a physical circumcision (a 1st circumcision) that is certainly valid, and it makes one part of physical Israel (a Jew in our modern way of speaking). However there is also a 2nd circumcision and it is spiritual in nature; it makes one part of true, spiritual Israel; God's ideal of Israel. And although this 2nd circumcision is a requirement for Jews to be part of the ideal Olive Tree that was theirs to begin with, it is also available to gentiles who want to become members of this same Olive Tree by means of the same covenants.

There are several other passages in the NT that also deal with this but one of my favorites is in Colossians because it dovetails so closely to our study in Joshua.

CJB Colossians 2:9 *For in him (Jesus), bodily, lives the fullness of all that God is. 10 And it is in union with him that you have been made full- he is the head of every rule and authority. 11 Also it was in union with him that you were circumcised with a circumcision not done by human hands, but accomplished by stripping away the old nature's control over the body. In this circumcision done by the Messiah, 12 you were buried along with him by being immersed; and in union with him, you were also raised up along with him by God's faithfulness that worked when he raised Yeshua from the dead. 13 You were dead because of your sins, that is, because of your "foreskin," your old nature. But God made you alive along with the Messiah by forgiving you all your sins.*

The pattern of what would come in the New Testament as a result of Yeshua's death and resurrection had been long ago established and it was illustrated for us in the circumcision requirements spoken of in Joshua 5. The key words of the first few verses of chapter 5 are **death** (or died) and **circumcision** just as it is in Colossians; and that is because Joshua 5 is the basis for Paul's rabbinical argument as expressed in Colossians 2.

Look again at Joshua 5 verses 8-9.

CJB Joshua 5:8 *When all the nation had been circumcised, every one of them, they stayed where they were in camp until they had healed. 9 ADONAI said to Y'hoshua, "Today I have rolled off from you the stigma of Egypt." This is why the place has been called Gilgal [rolling] ever since.*

The people of Israel who bear ONLY the 1st circumcision continued to bear the stigma (or in other versions, reproach) of Egypt in God's eyes. The 2nd circumcision as led by Joshua ended that stigma. Although the word construction is awkward for us, what "the stigma of Egypt" is referring to is the disobedience that the 1st Exodus generation (who were raised in Egypt) displayed towards the Lord. It was this stigma that led to their disobedience that led to their dying in the Wilderness, thereby being prohibited from entering the land of God's rest. Yehoveh essentially blames Egypt and their pagan ways for having polluted His people, and

THAT was one of the primary causes for that 1st generation of the Exodus to behave in such a rebellious manner, thereby causing God's judgment of death upon that 1st generation. Although in this case Egypt is of course real and literal as it pertains to this situation, the term "Egypt" eventually came to be used in Holy Scripture as a metaphor and an illustration of the sin and perversion that all the world bore, and that it had to be removed in order for anyone (Jew or gentile) to stand righteous before God. If the stigma of disobedience wasn't removed by means of the 2nd circumcision, then death (eternal death) was the result.

Also notice that the name given to the place where Israel first camped and where the circumcision of over a million Israelites happened was Gilgal, which means rolling or rolled in Hebrew. As our CJB does a good job in explaining Gilgal was given that name (rolled) because it was there that God "rolled" the stigma of Egypt off the backs of His people.....the people of the 2nd circumcision.

One more thing about the circumcision ceremony, the mass B'rit Milah, of Joshua 5 as it compares to the spiritual circumcision of the heart in the NT; who led PHYSICAL Israel over the Jordan River and then into this circumcision-of-foreskins ceremony? Joshua. What is Joshua's name in Hebrew? Yehoshua (God saves). Who led spiritual Israel over the Jordan and into the land of God's rest, and then into a circumcision-of-the-heart ceremony? Jesus. What is his name in Hebrew? Yehoshua (God saves).

Fascinating, yes? As I hope you see the Gospel of salvation is presented and is embedded throughout the Torah and the Tanakh (OT). As a further hope I pray you are getting a better understanding of the depth of the Gospel that one really cannot attain if we casually throw away the first and foundational part of our Bibles, the Old Testament. Truly we begin to see what Jesus meant when He stated that He had come not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.

After the circumcision ceremony verse 10 explains that they celebrated Passover on the 14th of the month. So they crossed over on the 10th day, likely circumcised on the 12th and 13th, and observed Passover on the 14th. Then the day AFTER Passover, which is the 15th day of the 1st month and is the Feast of Matza, they ate unleavened bread (Matza) and roasted grain. It was after this day than the Manna stopped and they ate food grown in the Promised Land.

Let me point out something that Richard S. Hess mentions in the Tyndale commentary series about the issue of the transition of Israel from eating Manna to eating food from the land of Canaan. Let me preface this by explaining to those who might not know that the Tyndale series and Tyndale Bible are created from a traditional and theologically conservative viewpoint, what today is commonly called a born-again or Evangelical Christian religious doctrine. Hess says that we cannot get around the fact that firmly coupled with Israel's crossing over from the Wilderness to the Promised Land, and from the 1st circumcision of death to the 2nd circumcision of life and inheritance, we find that Israel's diet radically changes. Instead of the Manna they had eaten for almost their entire time of wandering, now they not only eat from the fruits of the Promised Land, but by possessing the Promised Land they can ALSO eat what I would label as "Biblically Kosher" (as apart from Rabbinically Kosher").

The laws of eating Kosher didn't really apply in full for Israel until the congregation of Israel

crossed over the Jordan physically and spiritually. And I don't know of a Christian denomination that doesn't equate salvation with crossing over the Jordan; in fact it's memorialized in many standard Christian hymns. So I find it puzzling that while gentile Christianity almost universally sees the parallel between crossing over the Jordan and redemption, it has also taken the opposite tact from what is demonstrated in Joshua 5; that after wandering in the Wilderness for whatever portion of our lives, and then our receiving the 2nd circumcision (the spiritual circumcision of the heart that we call salvation), that we just go right on eating the food of our wandering, or one could even say more correctly that we continue eating just as we did when we were in subjugation to an evil taskmaster in Egypt.

Notice that it was only AFTER the 2nd circumcision that the food of wandering (Manna) stopped; it was only AFTER the Passover in Canaan that the Hebrews began to eat the Biblically Kosher diet prescribed in the Law. The Bible makes diet an important part of understanding God's spiritual principles. After Passover in Egypt everything changed for Israel and that change involved eating Manna. After Passover in Canaan everything changed AGAIN for Israel, and central to this change was a dramatic change in their diet from Manna to Biblically Kosher.

I find this a rather fundamental if not compelling argument for Believers, Jew or gentile, that diet is important to God and that we are meant to eat (as much as is possible) the prescribed diet for God's people. Let me emphasize yet again that eating kosher is NOT a means to achieve salvation nor to maintain it; but it is equally important to see that eating Kosher does seem to be a Biblically desirable diet for those who have been redeemed. Though for many that is not a pleasant thought, neither are many other of God's laws that are aimed primarily at adults such as giving sacrificially, charity, taking bold stands for the Lord, speaking out against evil, and denying ourselves things that we could have but perhaps it would be better for or relationship with the Lord if we didn't.

Let me preach at you for just a moment; the modern church has concerned itself with two things primarily, getting saved and getting blessed; I have been in precious few churches in my life that deal with much beyond that agenda. It's as though the be-all end-all of our salvation is so that God will bless us first with eternal life and then with all the stuff we want: from health, to money, to a good job. Anything else is seen as unnecessary or irrelevant.

Jesus, Paul, and other NT contributors said that salvation is the spiritual equivalent of going through the birth process again. And when we're born again we are immature and naïve. We're not supposed to stay that way, though, are we? We're supposed to grow, train ourselves, be open to more and more challenging tasks; let go of the overly simplistic childlike ways and attitudes we had at first and engage the more difficult matters of our relationship with God. We're supposed to move from being takers to givers, from being cared for to caring for others.

Moving from infancy to childhood to adult is traumatic; it is uncomfortable, trying, and dangerous at times; more is expected of us. Some are never successful; some will go our entire lives making decisions as though we are still children, always seeking more blessings and rarely seeking to reach out and bless others. We're perfectly satisfied and comfortable to

accept God as a child does, and so we go to our graves still behaving as spiritual toddlers. And although Jesus tells us that accepting Him as a child is where we're all to begin (and that is sufficient for salvation in Him) that's not at all where we're to remain.

So here is a question to ponder; is it time for you to leave behind years of spiritual childhood and move on to the greater things that await you in your Christian life? Is it time to realize that you haven't been force-fed spiritual milk, you've preferred it to heavenly meat? This is not an easy thing to face or buy into because when we do things don't get easier; they got a whole lot harder. Is being a parent or grandparent an easier life than your days of kindergarten? As spiritual adults we face issues that force us to make tough choices that might not please our friends or us. We become open to changes that are at times dramatic and a bit scary. But things can also become much more satisfying, and a new and higher level of joy and peace attained, because our lives are now playing out as mature Believers.

So as Yeshua said, "let the dead bury the dead; YOU follow Me".

We'll continue in Joshua 5 next week.