

### JOSHUA

#### Lesson 8 - Chapter 5 Continued

We ended last week in Joshua chapter 5 discussing the mass circumcision event at Gilgal that was instructed in verse 2. It is obvious that this circumcision ceremony was a pre-requisite for celebration of the Passover in Canaan.

Let's talk about this a little more because as I have mentioned each week as we study Joshua we are going to see the laws laid down in Torah begin to play out and manifest themselves in the lives of the people of Israel as they enter the Promised Land. The rules and instructions of God given through Moses out in the Wilderness move from theory and lofty idealism into practical reality now that Israel has crossed over the Jordan and into the land of their inheritance, Canaan. The problem is that the connection between the Torah commands and the activities in Joshua (and then in Judges, which we'll study next) are easy to overlook unless we know what to look for. And I suppose that little else is more important to me, personally, as a goal of this teaching ministry than to restore to the body of Believers that organic connection between what has become two testaments of a divided Bible.

Let's review the first few verses of chapter 5.

#### RE-READ JOSHUA 5:2 – 7

The Lord told Joshua that the reason that this so-called 2nd circumcision was needed was because while the males of Israel had been circumcised before they left Egypt, during their time in the Wilderness they had rebelled and suffered the penalty of being prohibited from entering the place of their destination: the Land of Promise. Further no circumcisions had occurred after leaving Egypt so the generation entering Canaan was uncircumcised.

Notice in verse 2 the instruction that knives of flint were to be used for the operation of removing the males' foreskins. By Joshua's day flint knives were obsolete having given way to bronze, and even to iron. Archeologists refer to Joshua's time as either the "Late Bronze" or "Early Iron" ages. The significance of those titles are that at the heart of the Bronze Age, bronze was the hardest metal in general use and it was always the hardest substances that were used to make knives and spear heads (for obvious reasons). As the title Iron Age implies, technology had developed to the point that iron metal (harder than bronze) was now being used; in the **Early** Iron Age use of iron was spotty and bronze was still the predominant substance of choice for making cutting instruments and weapons. The Early Iron Age is defined as about 1200 BC to 1000 BC.

The point being that the divine instruction to use FLINT knives for the circumcision ceremony was to tell Israel to use a type of knife that had gone out of use at least 2 or 3 centuries earlier. So why was flint called for? Since it is not explicitly explained in Scripture this has been a topic of interest among Hebrew and Christian scholars. In the end I see two reasons for it: one has to do with Traditions that developed naturally, and the other with following a long established God-pattern. The traditional aspect is that Joshua's ancestors Abraham and Jacob would have used flint knives to perform circumcisions. The use of a flint knife in the near-death incident of Abraham being asked to sacrifice Isaac (but then stopped, of course, by the Lord) also influenced the use of flint knives long after better choices were available. Thus knives made of flint were preferred by the Israelite priests for centuries in the ritual sacrifices made at the Tabernacle and then the Temple. I imagine it would have been quite dramatic to witness rituals using a flint knife as opposed to the more modern blades of bronze and iron used by the general population and thus greater meaning and a sense of the event being holy rather than ordinary was imparted.

But from a spiritual perspective the use of flint to cut off the foreskins of God's people represented the continuation of a God-pattern. And that pattern was the command that we saw given to the Patriarchs that they were to build altars for sacrifice to Yehoveh, but that knives of bronze (and later iron) were NOT to be used to shape the stones. However it was understood that FLINT knives COULD be used to shape the altar stones. Why was flint OK and metal was not? Because flint was a natural substance usable just as found; metal had to be extracted, heated, purged of impurities, and worked to be usable. Just as the altar stones were a 100% product of God and a 0% product of men, so was a flint blade. Metal required man's intervention and whenever man intervenes the purity of God's creation is compromised.

Therefore we see a connection between the stones used to build a holy altar of sacrifice to the Lord, and to the men of Israel who come forward to be circumcised and in the doing become holy members of God's Kingdom. Therefore neither is to have a metal tool used on them in an act of obedience that essentially MAKES them members of a holy body.

Consider this: the stones used to build the holy altar were just like all the other stones scattered on the ground; these were not special stones, nor different stones, whether used for the altar or not they were all natural just as God made them. It was from a rather random act of selection that these particular stones would be fitted carefully together to produce a holy place of sacrifice to God; in fact they were chosen from among stones that physically had no substantial differences. Yet, once chosen, and once united together for the purpose of serving the Lord those particular stones used for the altar became sanctified stones and thus had to be treated differently than ordinary stones because they had been separated and elected for God Almighty. The rule was that these now-sanctified stones could NOT be changed and modified using manmade metal instruments applied to them. Anything manmade is by definition not created by God and therefore falls short of perfection. Those imperfect metal knives would those stones that God had made perfect in the first place.

Notice the parallel: we have the men of Israel who, physically, were no different from other humans on the planet except that they were about to be selected and elected to become a set-apart people for God. Even genealogically, by now, the Israelites were mixed. Egyptians

formed a substantial part of Israel; foreigners from all races and cultures had been allowed to become Hebrews since the days of Abraham. So from among all men who are created basically physically the same, God selected those few who He would call Israelites and once chosen, and once united together for the purpose of serving the Lord, they became as sanctified stones and so had to be treated differently than all other men. As a symbol of that sanctification the male Israelites' bodies could not be modified (their foreskins could not be removed) by means of a manmade metal knife any more than using a manmade metal knife could modify the altar stones.

There is yet another fascinating element to this circumcision requirement that gets hidden from our view by its translation from the original Hebrew; and this is such an important principle that I could barely wait for today to come so that I could tell you about it. Everyone look at Joshua 5:4. It says that the reason for the circumcision ceremony at Gilgal was that "all the people who came out of Egypt" died in the Wilderness.

Now look at verse 6: it says that, "the people wandered in the Wilderness until all the people (the fighting men) died", and this because they disobeyed the Lord. Perhaps some of your translations will say that the people wandered in the Wilderness until the "whole nation" died.

Here's the thing: the focus is on the word "people". Even if your translation in verse 6 is "nation" it doesn't matter because the reference is still to the people who formed Israel. In verse 4 the Hebrew word that is being translated to "people" (the people who came out of Egypt) is **am**. **Am** is a word used in the Bible to denote God's nation or God's people. Technically it can mean people in the most generic sense; but more often it refers to kindred or fellow citizens. Once Israel came into being (with Jacob) the word **am** became a word of endearment reserved to explain the close relationship between the Lord and His chosen and set-apart people, Israel.

In verse 6 another and different Hebrew word is employed that is generally ALSO translated into English as "people" or "nation": it is **goy**. **Goy** is a word that also means a nation or people in a generic sense, but once the Hebrew people were formed and set-apart **goy** became a word that usually referred to NON-Hebrew people. Later **goy** came to mean gentiles or pagan people or nations specifically. So **am** in verse 4 refers to people set-apart for God, and **goy** in verse 6 refers to people who are NOT set-apart for God. In other words hidden beneath the English translation is a very critical status change of those Israelites who left Egypt; in God's eyes they went from **am** to **goy**, from His people to people no longer set apart for Him; in modern terms from Jews to gentiles.

Therefore we see that because (while still in Egypt) Moses ordered a circumcision ceremony for all Israelite males, they became physically and spiritually distinguished as God's people in spite of the fact that in all other respects they were not substantially different from the people they lived among (the Egyptians and other foreigners) who were NOT circumcised. So when these circumcised people were rescued by God from Pharaoh and LEFT Egypt (in what we call the Exodus) God classified them, as **am**, His people. Remember it is the ACT of circumcision that during this era is an outward symbol of a person's acceptance of God's covenants; circumcision is the thing that MAKES that male person an Israelite in the Lord's thinking. If one

has not been circumcised then one is NOT officially a member of Israel.

Later after leaving Egypt Israel rebelled against God to a point that in His divine wrath He determined that they would never be allowed to enter the Promised Land. He re-classified them (as we see happen from verse 4 to verse 6) from **am** to **goy**; people who were no longer in fellowship with Him. Of course this was in a more spiritual than physical sense. God never disbanded Israel; He even kept leading them in the fire-cloud.

Joshua 5 goes on to explain that since all the circumcised Israelite men had died out (during the Wilderness journey) and no circumcisions had occurred out in the Wilderness, there WERE no circumcised men and therefore from a **spiritual reality** (other than perhaps for Joshua) there were no Israelites!

Therefore we come full circle to the point that (here in Joshua) God is not about to turn His Promised Land over to people He sees as spiritual **goy**, gentiles, people who are no longer in fellowship with Him even though at one time they were. Thus the reason for the all-important mass circumcision ceremony at Gilgal that has been ordered BEFORE Israel will be allowed to observe the Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits.

I pray you can see the flow displayed here and the life-and-death God-pattern and principle that is revealed in it: Israel was only Israel when they were accepted by God as members of His covenant community; and this was accomplished by means of the sign of circumcision in the bodies of the males. AFTER their circumcision in Egypt, THEN God redeemed His people from Egypt. AFTER they were a circumcised people God referred to them, as **am**, His special people.

But soon this circumcised and redeemed people began to disobey God. After they left Egypt as the redeemed of the Lord their still-wicked hearts felt that now that they were redeemed, their God certainly had obligations to them (and they grumbled incessantly and constantly questioned Him when He didn't do what they thought He ought to do), but on the other hand they could kind of pick and choose which of those laws they had received on Mt. Sinai that they wanted to observe (or not!). The Lord saw this rebellion of His circumcised and redeemed people as sufficiently serious enough that He removed their special status from them. They went from being His people (**am**) to NOT His people (**goy**). That is what is being expressed in Joshua 5. By the way, the book of Hosea goes to great length to express this same principle and pattern in another setting, the warning of God against the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel who were rebelling against Him at this time. He said they would go from being **am** (or **ammi**) to **LO-ammi** as a result of their wickedness. **Ammi** are by definition God's people, **Lo-ammi** are by definition NOT God's people (**lo** is Hebrew for no or not). **Lo-ammi** is essentially just another way of saying **goy**.

And sure enough the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom and the millions of members of Israel who lived among those 10 tribes were scattered across the Asian Continent, the vast majority (although not quite all) absorbed into the cultures of the gentiles to the point that they virtually became gentiles (**goy, lo-ammi**).

A word to the wise, we ignore this principle and pattern at our own peril; despite a lot of dubious church doctrines to the contrary the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation makes it clear that it is the Lord who determines our status before Him. And that just because we are redeemed at one time doesn't mean that we can go our own way, disobey Him with utter disregard for His holiness, and by doing so to a serious enough degree essentially renounce our redemption without the worst of consequences.

So from a **spiritual** standpoint (from God's standpoint) the writer of Joshua says it was 3 million **goyim** who had just crossed the Jordan into Canaan even though they went by the name of Israel. Bottom line: God will not turn His land, His kingdom, over to spiritual **goy** (people who are not in fellowship with Him). That privilege, the privilege of membership in the Kingdom of God, goes only to those who abide in Him, those who He gives the status of **am** (His people).

Naturally we see this principle presented in the New Testament. I won't go to all those passages today, but Romans 2 and 3 especially talk about the requirement of circumcision to become a member of God's covenant community (regardless of whether one is a physical Jew or gentile); however it is a circumcision of the heart, not of the flesh, that is required. That is because the true circumcision that God is looking for is spiritual in nature, not physical.

Further Romans 11 uses the illustration of an Olive Tree to make the same point as we just saw happening in Joshua. Paul makes it clear that just as many Hebrews who were at one time circumcised and redeemed (and therefore made branches of the Olive Tree) were removed from that tree for falling away from God, so it is with ANYONE (Jew or gentile) who at one time receives a spiritual circumcision and redemption but falls away from God; they too will be cut off of that tree for failing to maintain their trust.

**CJB Romans 11:17 *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you- a wild olive- were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, 18 then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you. 19 So you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 True, but so what? They were broken off because of their lack of trust. However, you keep your place only because of your trust. So don't be arrogant; on the contrary, be terrified! 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he certainly won't spare you! 22 So take a good look at God's kindness and his severity: on the one hand, severity toward those who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you- provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off!***

Now circumcised and spiritually readied for the task ahead Israel was given the go-ahead to observe the Spring Festivals. I realize that the only Bible Feast mentioned in these verses is Pesach, Passover. But that is because it was such common knowledge among the Hebrews that Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits came as a bundle of Feasts. This is why it is critical for every Believer to study Torah (and especially Leviticus) because the way these Feasts work is carefully laid out. Passover occurs on the 14th day of the 1st month, Unleavened Bread on the next day (the 15th), and Firstfruits the day after that (the 16th).

There is no such thing as celebrating one of these Feasts but not the others; they come as a package. Therefore while verse 10 explains that Israel celebrated Passover, it also says they ate Matza (unleavened bread) AND ate the produce of the land, obvious references to the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits.

Look: the celebration of these 3 Feasts and the ending of Manna represent a transition of lifestyle for Israel. Rather than eating Manna of the desert they can eat produce from their own land, the land God gave to them. Obviously the produce they ate this first time had been grown by the Canaanites; and until Israel conquered all the land they would celebrate many Feasts using grains and fruits and vegetables produced by their enemies. The key was that it was grown on the Promised Land and THEY were the consumers.

But another point we must acknowledge is that now that Israel is more mature they are expected to live off what the land produces rather than what God simply rained from Heaven. This is a step that all who trusts in the Messiah of the God of Israel needs to take, but we tend to resist it with greatest effort. How desperately we try to just keep looking up and begging God to rain blessings upon us, when what He wants is for us to go forward as His army and claim the already plentiful bounty of His Creation. But to do so takes boldness, effort, courage and much greater faith and trust. Who wouldn't rather sit in their chair and pray for God's blessing, rather than get to their feet and do what He commands? But there lies the difference between the baby Believer and the mature Believer.

How often people have come to me (or I have heard Christians lament) and say, "I need to be fed".

**CJB John 21:14 *This was now the third time Yeshua had appeared to the talmidim after being raised from the dead. 15 After breakfast, Yeshua said to Shim'on Kefa, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, do you love me more than these?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I'm your friend." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, do you love me?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I'm your friend." He said to him, "Shepherd my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, are you my friend?" Shim'on was hurt that he questioned him a third time: "Are you my friend?" So he replied, "Lord, you know everything! You know I'm your friend!" Yeshua said to him, "Feed my sheep!***

Certainly new Believers, new disciples of Yeshua, need to be fed. Sometimes when we are in desperate times, we need to be fed. We can find ourselves in moments when we are paralyzed by life, and we need to be fed (and there is no shame in that). But that is not where we are supposed to reside or remain if it is up to us. As Believers it is as much our jobs to grow and mature, as it is a child's to grow and mature. We are intended to move from needing to be fed daily, to being the ones who feed others. Like Israel approaching the Passover only hours after entering the Promised Land, a transition must occur in the lives of Believers.

Chapter 5 takes a very odd and sudden turn at verse 13; Joshua looked up and in front of him stood a man with a sword in his hand. Without hesitation Joshua confronts him with the logical question, (I paraphrase) "are you friend or foe?"

The “man” gives Joshua a strange answer: “no”. In Hebrew it says the man responded, “**lo**”. And indeed **lo** means no; but actually this common Hebrew word can simply indicate answering in the negative within a number of different contexts. It can mean “no”, it can mean “none”, it can mean “not”, and in response to Joshua’s question it can mean “neither”(in other words, no Joshua it is not either one of those choices you just presented).

Rather, says this man, He is the commander of the Lord’s hosts. Actually it says that he is the **sar** of God’s army or hosts. **Sar** means the leader or prince. Instantly Joshua falls onto his face in worship and asks, “what does my Lord have to say to me?” In Hebrew it says, “what does Adonai have to say to me?” It was instantly obvious that the man who was standing in front of Joshua was a heavenly being, a representative of God at the least.

Then we get a familiar command from this prince of the Lord’s army: “take off your sandals because where you are standing is holy”. We could spend a lot of time here, but I’ll only deal with this briefly.

Notice that this is NOT a vision or a dream; Joshua was not asleep nor in an ecstatic state and this is quite real. There indeed was a man standing in front of Joshua even if it was an apparition. But who or WHAT was this being? Well whoever it was spoke with God’s authority. When a regular angel, a God-messenger, came to people in the Bible and the awestruck human first saw him the usual reaction was to fall flat on his face and worship the angel. In reaction the angel would (without fail) tell the person to stand up and not worship him because he is NOT God, rather he is a created being.

In this case the apparition expects and accepts Joshua’s worship and declares that because of its presence the place is holy. Let’s dissect this for a moment because we run into this kind of troubling dilemma often in the Bible.

Who was (or what was) in the Burning Bush that drew Moses to it? The usual answer is God. However the Scripture doesn’t SAY it was God; rather it says in Exodus 3:2 that the “malach of Yehoveh” appeared in the Burning Bush. It says that the “Messenger of Yehoveh” appeared (although in this context messenger is usually translated as angel). However this messenger identified himself NOT as the Word, NOT as the Holy Spirit, but as the great I AM. As a result of being in the presence of the great I AM, Moses was to remove his sandals because God’s presence made the very dirt surrounding the area holy.

We find the expression “the Angel of the Lord” in a number of places in the Bible and it always has the Lord speaking in the first person (I, Me). So the line between the nature of the Messenger of God and God Himself blurs.

We find this same phrase as used here in Joshua 5:14 (I am the **sar** of God’s army) used in only one other place in the Old Testament, and this is in Daniel 8:11 as regards a vision Daniel was having while in exile in Babylon. And this phrase in Daniel is speaking about God but in a more offhand way.

We also find that the Shekinah is also used as a physical but non-human apparition that is

directly associated with God, and God speaks as the Shekinah with authority and also in the 1st person.

Here's the thing: this particular being says He is the captain, or leader, or Commander of God's warrior angels. And the drawn sword is symbolic of battle. So I would like to make two points about this and then move on.

Point number one: we must be very careful in our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. The word Trinity never appears in the Bible, rather it is a church doctrine created as a result of the phrase, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit". If one limits the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity to meaning that God manifests Himself primarily as Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit then I agree with it. But if we expand that to mean that God manifests Himself ONLY as Father, Son and Holy Spirit without the possibility of any other divine manifestation then I cannot agree. What or who is the Angel of the Lord? What or who is the Shekinah? What or who was that human apparition that approached Abraham and he called "Adonai"? Nowhere does the Bible assign any of those divine manifestations of the Lord to the categories of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, it is obvious that they WERE God in some form.

The tendency in modern Evangelical Christianity is to create a doctrine, give it a title, and then read that doctrine backwards into Scripture; and since the Trinity doctrine is sometimes, in some denominations, taught that God MUST BE in the mold of either Father, Son or Holy Spirit and nothing else is possible, then any and every Biblical reference to something that obviously represents God (like the Shekinah or the Angel of the Lord, or as here the Commander of the Lord's Hosts), MUST BE one of those three and so if any kind of physical appearance happens, then it is said that it must be Christ because He came as physical being, born to Miriam and Joseph. It is also interesting that this debate especially targets any Old Testament manifestation of God as having to fit in to the New Testament wording, created hundreds of years later, or it must be discarded.

Now I wish I had a full answer to this dilemma of the full essence of God's nature and in the way that the Lord manifests Himself; a dilemma that has dogged Christianity since Paul's time and that has befuddled Judaism since it's emergence, but I don't. But neither am I satisfied with creating a doctrine, casting it in concrete, and then declaring that anyone who disagrees with it must not be a true Believer; and this just so we can HAVE a ready, firm and easy answer. Especially am I dissatisfied when this happens with something like this topic that is so hazy, and thus requires that liberal amounts of allegory or extrapolation must be spread over it so as to make it heresy to question any part of it on any level.

Let me be clear: ***I do*** generally accept the doctrine of the Trinity, but do not go so far as to say that it fully explains every possible manifestation of God, the fullness of His nature, or that it should be a closed subject.

Point number two: while this being is a physical apparition, it is by definition the physical apparition of a spiritual being. It is clear from this commander of God's hosts that he has NOT come to do earthly battle; he has not come to battle against Joshua nor has he come to add to Joshua's army as an earthly ally. His message to Joshua is in two parts: one part is spoken

(Take off your sandals, you're on holy ground), and the other part is the visual symbolism of the drawn sword as of a warrior about to enter battle and the apparition identifying himself as THE warrior leader of God's spiritual army.

My best understanding of this is admittedly my opinion; and my opinion is that the Lord is revealing to Joshua that while Joshua is doing battle on earth the Lord is doing parallel battle in the heavens. God is showing Joshua that what goes on in Heaven and what happens on earth are connected. This is the classic case of the Reality of Duality; that there is a spiritual reality occurring simultaneously with a physical reality and they operate like a pair of railroad tracks, but only one side is seen. On the other hand we can KNOW where the invisible track is going, because its connected to the side we CAN see. Daniel makes vivid mention of spiritual princes doing battle that has some connection with happenings on earth, but yet we don't have Daniel's princes fighting humans. There is a lot we just don't know about the spiritual realm and its definite but mysterious connection with the physical realm; on the other hand I'd rather leave it that way and not give you a bunch of speculations by revered men that may or may not be so.

Many will say that this Commander of the Lord's army in Joshua 5 is a pre-incarnate apparition of Jesus. I can't totally dismiss that view, but I don't find anything concrete to back that up so I can't accept it either. That said this does offer us a good illustration of another intractable problem for (I think) every Believer: was Jesus a flesh and blood man, or was He God, or was He a rather long term apparition of God during his 33 years on earth, or was He all of the above?

My answer to that question is that Yeshua was God and man at the same time. Yet it is not that easy or simple; because we find Jesus often praying to "God", who is obviously a being outside of Himself, and asking for God's will to be done AND NOT HIS OWN! Otherwise we literally have Yeshua praying to Himself! The evening before His execution He is asking the Father if it might not be His will to take this horrendous event that is about to unfold away from Him, rather than having to endure it. We even find that John is baptizing Jesus and the Holy Spirit of God descends upon Him. Well are we saying that Jesus was an incomplete God until that moment? That as the Son of God He was not enough of God to have sufficient power to do what He must?

Again, I can't answer that question but I've already told you that I do have faith that he was God and he was man because he said he was; so that settles it for me. HOW that is possible I cannot visualize nor can I explain in words; it is a matter of faith that the Word of God is true even if it seems impossible, almost ridiculous.

By the way, does anyone here think that Joshua fully understood the nature of what stood before him with that drawn sword? Somehow, instinctively, Joshua knew to believe what that God-apparition said to him. I suspect that Joshua instantly recalled the many times Moses must have recounted the story of that incredible few minutes when he found himself lying face down before the Burning Bush as the Lord of Creation spoke to him. Something was different enough of this being, and bore sufficient authority, that the last words of this chapter have Joshua responding to the Commander of the Lord's army in this way: "And Joshua did so".

## Lesson 8 - Joshua 5 Cont.

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That is a very simple way to illustrate acting on faith when it is humanly impossible to understand your circumstances.

We'll start chapter 6 next time.