Joshua 4:19–5:1 — Gilgal: The Reproach of Egypt Rolled Away

Circumcision, the Tenth Day, the Passover, the Old Corn, and Things Necessary Before Victory

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Scripture Reading: Joshua 4:19–5:1

> *"And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal.*
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> *That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.*
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> *And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites… and all the kings of the Canaanites… heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more.*
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> *And the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time… And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.*
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> *And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month… And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land."*

The Tenth Day: God's Superintendence of the Timing

Israel came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. This is the day on which the lamb was to be selected according to Exodus 12:3 — taken on

the tenth day and kept until the fourteenth, so that the days between might demonstrate and exhibit its spotlessness. God superintended the timing of the crossing so that the Passover might be properly observed. They came up on the very day the lamb was to be set apart.

There is a difference in purpose between examining the lamb and finding no blemishes, and looking for sins in the Lord Jesus in the hope of finding some. Many have read the Gospels with the latter purpose. They find nothing — because there is nothing to find. But those who look for purity and spotlessness in the Lord Jesus, especially in those last days before the cross where the Gospels give special attention to his words and actions, find exactly that. The lamb without blemish is set forth. These days in Gilgal, before the Passover on the fourteenth, answer to those days of exhibition.

Coming Up Out of Jordan: One Whole Action

It is observed that the Scripture does not speak of the people coming up out of the Red Sea, but it does speak of them coming up out of Jordan. The two crossings — Red Sea and Jordan — coalesce in Scripture's purpose: they form one great whole action of God. His purpose was to bring the people out of Egypt and into the land. The wilderness comes in by the way as part of his dealings with them, but it is not the destination. The wording in Exodus makes this plain: he brought them out in order to bring them in. In God's mind the two crossings are one continuous act of redemption and possession.

The differences in the accounts are also significant. The Red Sea formed walls of water on each side — a channel cut through the sea. At the Jordan, the waters were stopped so far upstream that those crossing may not have seen them at all, only dry ground ahead. Through the Red Sea; over the Jordan. Two descriptions, two aspects of one work of God.

Gilgal: Named Before It Earned Its Name

Gilgal — the name means rolling — is mentioned in chapter 4 before the circumcision that would give it that name. This is one of those places in Scripture where a location is called by a name before the event that earned it. There was no town of Gilgal there; it was the plains of Jericho. The name was given because of the circumcision: “This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.” The place became Gilgal because of what God did there, and the name stuck permanently as a reminder of that moment.

Gilgal became much more than a campsite. After their victories in the land, Israel returned to Gilgal. It was the base of operations. The twelve stones were there, the memorial of death and resurrection with Christ. The circumcision was there, the cutting off of the flesh. The Passover was kept there. The old corn of the land was eaten there. Everything necessary was gathered at that place before the battle of Jericho. Gilgal, in its typical meaning, is the ground from which all spiritual warfare proceeds.

Circumcision: The Reproach of Egypt Rolled Away

The entire generation that had come out of Egypt as men of war had died in the wilderness. Their children, born during the forty years of wandering, had not been circumcised. They had been bearing the reproach of Egypt — looking outwardly like uncircumcised Gentiles, like lawless Bedouin tribesmen rather than a people set apart to God. Now, at Gilgal, the circumcision was performed. The reproach was rolled away.

God had not saved his people to set them free to do whatever they pleased. He had redeemed them to do his will. The logic is plain: a father might say to his son, You are my son always, I will never disown you, I love you forever. If he then says, and therefore you may go and do whatever you like, that last sentence contradicts everything before it. The fitting end of such a declaration is: now

behave as my son. Circumcision at Gilgal is that word: you have passed over Jordan, you are in the land, now bear the mark of what you are.

Colossians 2:11 gives the anti-type: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” Not piece by piece, as in Romans where one reckons oneself dead to individual things — here the whole body of the flesh is put off at once. The entire first man is removed from before God. He is completely gone. That is the circumcision of Christ, and it answers to Gilgal.

The Twelve Stones and the Question the Children Must Ask

Joshua pitched the twelve stones in Gilgal — the stones taken from the river bed, from the place where the priests’ feet had stood. These were the visible memorial of what Israel had passed through. The purpose was explicit: so that when your children ask in time to come, What mean these stones? — you shall have an answer.

But the children will only ask the question if they are brought to Gilgal and see the stones. And they will only think the stones significant if the behavior of the parents suggests that they are. A pile of twelve stones by a road is not, in itself, remarkable. What makes children ask about these stones is that the power of Gilgal is in exercise in the parent’s soul — that the cutting off of the flesh and the resurrection with Christ is visible in the life. The monument at Gilgal is mirrored by the monument of a life that answers to it. Without that, the children walk past the stones and ask nothing.

This parallels the Lord’s Supper. The children see it week by week and may ask, What means this service? The stones are different: there is no weekly exhibition of them. The only thing that will make a child ask what the stones mean is a life that bears the mark of circumcision — a life from which the flesh is visibly cut off, and in which the power of resurrection is evident. That is the living

monument at Gilgal.

The Passover, the Old Corn, the Manna Ceased

On the fourteenth day they kept the Passover. On the fifteenth — the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread — they ate the old corn of the land. And on that same day the manna ceased. Not gradually, not with a transition period: one day manna, the next day old corn of the land. The food proper to the wilderness was done; the food proper to Canaan began.

The Passover here has a different character from the Passover in Egypt. In Egypt it was entirely about safety from judgment: sheltered by the blood from the angel of death. Here it is kept by a circumcised people on Canaan ground, after passing through Jordan. There is vastly more present — death with Christ, resurrection with Christ, the reproach rolled away, the land entered. This Passover is not just about being sheltered from judgment; it is the celebration of those who have come through death into life and stand in a new position entirely. As noted before, the institution of the Lord's Supper itself took on added meaning after the body of Christ was formed — the one loaf speaking not only of Christ's body given in death, but of the whole body of Christ on earth.

The Melting Hearts of the Kings: Weakness Is Not the Signal for Attack

Chapter 5:1 records that when all the kings of the Amorites and Canaanites heard what the Lord had done at the Jordan, their hearts melted and there was no spirit left in them. Their fear is palpable. It might seem like the perfect moment to attack: the enemies are demoralized, the people of Israel are fresh from a great miracle, the momentum is there.

But God does not use the enemy's weakness as the signal to act. Instead, the very next thing that happens is circumcision at Gilgal — which left the entire fighting

force of Israel vulnerable and unable to fight for days. The perception of the enemy's weakness is not the Lord's signal that the time has come. There are a number of things that must come first: the reproach must be rolled away, the mark of separation must be put on the people, the Passover must be kept, the old corn of the land must be eaten, the manna must cease, the captain of the Lord's host must be met and worshipped. Only then — with all these things in place — does the conquest begin. The lesson carries forward: the default weakness of an opponent is not in itself the Lord's call to advance.

This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal.