

*Meditations on the Book of Joshua*

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# Joshua 5

*Circumcision — Gilgal — Canaan's Food — The Captain of the Lord's Host*

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### CIRCUMCISION

In Joshua 1 we have traced the moral principles requisite for taking possession of Canaan; in Joshua 2 we have seen that, when it is a question of heavenly places, God can go outside the limits of Israel, and bring in on the principle of faith; in Joshua 3 and Joshua 4 we find the secret of entrance; and in Joshua 5 something further is unfolded to us, namely, how the victory is obtained. Consequently, this chapter opens (v. 1) with a mention of the enemies. All the kings of the Canaanites and the Amorites defile, so to speak, under our eyes, but the power given them by Satan has already been broken at Jordan, in death, in the person of their Prince. In spite of that, they are too strong for the poor children of Israel, but God is going to enable them to obtain the victory over their enemies. And how? By depriving them of all the weapons and resources which they would have found in themselves. Flesh cannot enlist in the warfare; God judges it and sets it aside; and this is the meaning of circumcision. Circumcision is "the putting off of the body of the flesh" in Christ. It is an accomplished fact for every believer, just as much as the Jordan is for each of us, whether or not we realise its import.

The teaching of Colossians 2: 9-15 on this point is very clear and beautiful. "In him," says the apostle, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." All is in Christ, nothing is lacking in Him. But in verse 10, it is we who have all in Him; nothing lacks for us: "Ye are complete in Him." We cannot, then, seek to add anything to ourselves apart from Him. Now we come to circumcision. "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 only, says the apostle, is there nothing to add, but there is nothing to cut off from those who are in Him. The body of the flesh is judged, you are deprived of it; it is a thing done, it is the circumcision of Christ. In verse 12, we find that this end of the old man, which takes place for us in the death of Christ, becomes personal for the Christian: "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." This passage embraces the thing in its extent, and corresponds with the two truths represented by the Jordan, namely, death and resurrection with Christ. Here then we have the establishment of two great truths: we are complete before God in Christ, and perfectly delivered from all that we are in ourselves.\*

{\*In verses 13-15, we return to the Passover and the Red Sea; we are delivered from all which can be pleaded or raised against us.}

The Epistle to the Philippians (Phil. 3: 3) establishes the contrast between the circumcision made with hands, and the true circumcision, that of Christ. "We are the circumcision," says the apostle, "who worship God in the Spirit." Fleshly circumcision under the law had never done that. One must have done with the flesh to be able to worship in the Spirit. Then he adds, "And who rejoice in Christ Jesus." Even religious flesh never glories in anything but itself."

{\*We find a proof of this in Colossians 2: 21-23. The doctrines, commandments, and teachings of men may in deed have a show of wisdom .... inasmuch as they do not spare the body, but they are for the satisfaction of the flesh.}

Finally, the apostle concludes by saying: "And who have no confidence in the flesh." This is true circumcision. It is the setting aside by judgment in the cross of Christ of what the word of God calls "the flesh," so that henceforth we cannot have any confidence whatever in it, and this is a most important truth to get hold of. When it is a question of warfare, as it was for the children of Israel, we must bear on us the stigma of the death of the flesh. Notice, too, there is no thought here of trying to have done with ourselves, or of stripping ourselves. The "putting off" was accomplished at the cross; sin in the flesh was condemned there; it is a fact which faith grasps, and which becomes a practical reality as the conscience owns and accepts this judgment. The burning coal had to touch the lips of Isaiah, and even though the judicial fire from off the altar had exhausted every atom of its power upon the victim, and the anguish being over nothing remained but the purifying power, still the prophet had to be brought into contact with it, thus typifying the experience our consciences pass through, of divine judgment.

## GILGAL

And the Lord said unto Joshua: "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you." At the Red Sea they had been delivered from the slavery of Satan and of sin; here, for the first time, they were freed by judgment from the slavery of the flesh. But the Spirit of God adds: "Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day." Here we have a second great truth. As has been already observed, circumcision, judgment, the cutting off of the flesh, has been accomplished in Christ, but has also to be considered under an essentially practical aspect, and not purely as doctrine.

Gilgal was the place of circumcision, and if this place was to be the point of departure for the army of Jehovah before a single victory had been achieved, it was also to be the assembling place after victory (Joshua 10: 15), and again the point of departure for fresh conquests. The judgment of the flesh was immovable. The people were to appropriate it to themselves continually, otherwise the flesh would work to regain what it had lost, and a first victory would never be followed by a second. We shall come upon Gilgal in the course of this book on more than one occasion; for the present let it suffice us to remember that if circumcision signifies the cutting off of "the body of the flesh," Gilgal is "the mortification of our members which are upon the earth." Colossians 3: 5-8 teaches us this in contrast with Colossians 2: 11.

Beloved, this is a daily reality, and every victory opens out fresh horizons for us in the land of promise. Without conflict there is no means of laying hold of any of our blessings, but without Gilgal there can be no victory. Which do we value most? Canaan with its warfare, or our members upon the earth? Do we prefer the passing gratification of the lusts of the flesh to the painful task of returning to Gilgal? If so, we shall have to be taught by humiliation and chastisement how to recover the path, if, at least, we have not irrevocably lost the secret of strength in bitterness and tears and the irremediable ruin of defeat.

## CANAAN'S FOOD

The cutting off of the flesh by the judgment executed at the cross, and the practical realisation of this judgment are the first conditions indispensable for warfare. Of what use were Saul's helmet, coat of mail, or sword, to David in fighting against the Philistine? He had to "put them off him." (1 Sam. 17: 39)

But there is another resource. Before going forth to fight, Israel must be seated at the table of God. To be able to withstand the toils of warfare, Israel must be nourished; that is the secret of positive strength. And what is the nourishment? Christ. He is the source of strength, and there will be

no victory for the people if they have not been previously fed. What a blessed thing to enter into the conflict with hearts fed by Christ. We may certainly expect to be defeated if we advance to meet the enemy with hearts void of Christ. In the reverse case, as we shall see in the following chapter, there is nothing alarming about the combat, and may God give us each to prove this. Let us not wait until the morrow, for we may be called to fight this very evening. Let us feed on Christ to-day, to-morrow, every moment, that we may be ready at the first signal to arise and march on to victory.

Yes, beloved, it is a Person; it is Christ who is our food; not truths, nor privileges, but Himself; and He is here presented to us as food under three different aspects: the Passover, the Old Corn of the land, and the Manna.

This Passover in Canaan is the same feast that the people had celebrated in Egypt, and yet how much they differed one from the other. There, it was a people conscious of their guilt, hasting to flee, sheltered amidst the darkness and the judgment by the blood of the paschal lamb. Here, it is a people safely landed in Canaan, delivered from the last traces of the reproach of Egypt, a risen people, who have been through death, but who return in perfect peace to the starting-point, the foundation of all their blessings, to sit around the memorials of a Christ slain for them on the cross. The Passover in Canaan corresponds with what the Lord's Supper is for the Christian. And notice, it is a permanent food; it will not cease in the glory; only it will no longer be the remembrance of the Lord's death celebrated during His absence, neither shall we need something tangible to remind us of it, for our eyes will see in the midst of the throne, the Lamb Himself, as it had been slang, He the visible centre of the new creation founded on the cross, the basis and pivot of eternal blessing, the object upon whom myriads of myriads gaze with adoring and universal worship.

But there is more than this in our heavenly repast. "And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn in the self-same day." (v. 11) God gave them a food which had been unknown to them in Egypt, the old corn of the land of Canaan, a heavenly, glorified Christ, but Christ as a Man who had been through this sin-stained world in a spotless humanity, the unleavened bread, and who in this same humanity had passed through the fire of judgment like the parched corn, and who, having entered the glory in resurrection, sits as Man at the right hand of God.

Moreover He is there for us, not only as our Advocate with the Father, but as introducing us in His Person as Man into the glory. The place is

prepared for man in the third heavens; he is brought in Christ into the full enjoyment of heavenly blessing. I behold this Man and say: There is my place; I am in Him, a man in Christ, possessing already the same life as He, life eternal, the life of a Man risen from among the dead; I am united to Him, seated in Him in the heavenly places, enjoying this infinite blessing by the Holy Spirit who leads me into it. Blessed Saviour! for me Thou camest down, for me Thou didst hang on the cross; Thou art gone into the glory, and Thou hast brought me into it already in Thine own Person, previous to being with Thee and like Thee for ever.

What wondrous joy and what power there is in occupation with such a Christ! "We all with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3: 18) In this passage we see the result of being nourished with the old corn of the land. The soul, formed by a heavenly Christ, is able to reproduce the traits of this blessed object. Such is our portion.

Such also was that of Stephen, the faithful martyr. In him, a man on the earth, full of the Holy Spirit, as fruit of the perfect work of Christ, we see a believer in his normal character, answering perfectly to the end for which God had placed him in this world, in the midst of circumstances that were the most calculated to make him lose that character. The Spirit in him unhindered (his heart having no object on the earth, and the Holy Ghost not having to contend within him to bring him to the level of a heavenly Christ) links him with an object in heaven so as to form him here into its image. The traits of the glorified Man in heaven become in him those of a perfect man on the earth: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Here it is an example of what it is "to be changed into the same image from glory to glory." It is not anything mystical, nor a vague product of human imagination; it is in our daily life, our ways, our words, by love, intercession, patience, and dependence, that we may, through grace, show forth the likeness of a glorified Christ on whom we gaze. Is it so with us Christians in these days? Are our hearts so fed by Him that the world can see it in our lives? Can those around us catch the rays of the glory of Christ on our countenances, as with Stephen or Moses? It would not be for us to know it, for in this case we should have lost sight of the heavenly object, and turned our eyes upon ourselves. Moses alone in the camp of Israel wist not that his countenance shone.

"And the manna ceased on the morrow." (v. 12) Israel ate it no more; manna was wilderness food; for us a Christ come down from heaven into the midst of our circumstances to encourage us in the difficulties of the way. In contrast with Israel, we Christians are privileged to have Christ as our food in every aspect at the same time, though perhaps not at the

same moment. But the manna is not a permanent food. Indispensable and most blessed as it is that the remembrance of it should remain before God always, in the golden pot, and for us in "the hidden manna," still as food it is transitory and suited to the journey which comes to an end. Now the Old Corn of the land will, like the Passover, be our lasting and eternal food; not in order that we should be, as on earth, transformed gradually into His likeness, for then "we shall be fashioned like unto His glorious body." (Phil. 3: 21) "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3: 2)

## THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

Conflict is about to begin, and the Captain of the host has not yet appeared. He reveals Himself at the last moment, but precisely at the needed one, "when Joshua was by Jericho." (v. 13) Faith can count on Him for the time of need. Gilgal and the heavenly repast are, as we have seen, the preparations for warfare; the power, the plan, the order, the time of battle, all that and much more is the responsibility of the Captain of the host. Such a way of fighting will be incomprehensible to one who has not been at Gilgal. He would set to work with his own contrivances, would engage the enemy too soon or too late, would rush forward without the Captain of the host, make a false movement, fall, and be conquered, leaving nothing but a catalogue of defeats.

Notice with what marvellous grace this representative of Jehovah adapts Himself to the circumstances of His people, this Angel of Jehovah of whom the Old Testament so often speaks — Jehovah Himself under this mysterious character, for it is said of Him (Ex. 23: 21) "My name is in him." As others have observed, He presents Himself with Israel as a Deliverer at the Red Sea, as the Companion of their journeyings in the desert, as Lord of Hosts in Canaan, and later on when the kingdom is established, He dwells in peace amongst them.

Blessed condescension! What assurance it gives to our souls. Here we see Him sword in hand, and it is this sword which will deal the blows. Israel needs no other.

Three times in the course of the people's history, the Angel of Jehovah intervenes with the drawn sword in his hand. The first time it is to preserve them from threatened dangers, when Balaam, on his way to curse Israel, encounters the messenger who obstructs his road (Num. 22: 28), the second time, in our chapter, it is to fight with them and obtain the victory for them; the third time, alas! it is to judge the people who had sinned in the person of their king. (1 Chron. 21: 16)

Beloved, we also have to do with the Angel in these three ways. How many times, without our even being aware of it, He meets the enemy