

Enter at Your Own Rest

Studies in the Book of Joshua

"Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it"

Alan Redpath

Text

Joshua 5:1-9

Topic

Forty years after their fathers were disciplined for refusing to enter the Promised Land the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise the new generation of Israelites as a renewal of His covenant

Title

"Foreskins and Forty Years Ago"

Joshua 5:1 So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who *were* on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who *were* by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel -

Joshua 5:2 At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time."

Joshua 5:3 So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.

Joshua 5:4 And this *is* the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt *who were* males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt.

Joshua 5:5 For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised.

Joshua 5:6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people *who were* men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD - to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey."

Joshua 5:7 Then Joshua circumcised their sons *whom* He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

Joshua 5:8 So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed.

Joshua 5:9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.

Introduction

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians "full recovery following adult circumcision may require four to six weeks." They're talking about a sterile procedure performed under local anesthesia in a fully equipped office or hospital with precise surgical instruments by trained surgeons.

In hostile territory about two miles from the walled city of Jericho Joshua incapacitated the entire army of Israel by circumcising them. Not as a trained surgeon with precise surgical instruments using local anesthesia! He did it with homemade **flint knives**. Then instead of disposing of the foreskins as medical waste he simply threw them in a pile and called it the **hill of the foreskins**.

I submit to you that the enemies of Israel holed-up in Jericho could see the **hill of the foreskins**; there would be hundreds of thousands of them. They would know Israel's army was vulnerable.

I cannot emphasize enough the strangeness of this strategy. It screams at us that there is a spiritual lesson to be learned.

It's a very simple lesson, really. Our warfare may take place in a physical environment but it is essentially spiritual. Thus battles are never won, nor are enemies ever defeated, in our own strength. We must have no confidence in our own intelligence, talents, or abilities. Those things must be incapacitated before we can fully follow the Lord's leading.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Circumcision Is A Spiritual Operation You Want To Receive, and #2 Circumcision Is A Spiritual Operation You Don't Want To Reverse.

#1 Circumcision Is A Spiritual Operation
You Want To Receive
(v1-7)

Male circumcision was given to Abraham as the sign of God's covenant with him and his descendants that He would give them the Promised Land and bless their seed as a nation.

Though a physical rite it always had a spiritual symbolism. In Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6 God told His people to circumcise their **hearts**. God was always more concerned with the heart.

The New Testament also emphasizes circumcision as a heart issue. The apostle Paul defined true circumcision in Romans 2:29 when he said, **he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart**.

Every believer in Jesus Christ – whether male or female – is described as already being **circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ** (Colossians 2:11). **Without hands** means it is something internal and spiritual. It is a **putting off**, or literally the removal, **of the body of the sins of the flesh**. The sinful, fallen human nature that dominates you before you are saved has been removed by Jesus. It is part of what happened to you when you became a Christian. You are given a new nature and are a new creation in Jesus Christ.

Here's the catch: my new spiritual nature resides in my old physical body. My old physical body still has inclinations and dispositions and tendencies to satisfy itself in ways that are sinful. We call this the flesh.

My new spiritual nature residing in my flesh sets up an internal conflict. Will I act and react according to the lusts and desires that remain in my flesh? Or will I act and react according to the delights of my new nature in Christ?

It is precisely at that point of conflict that I am to understand I have been spiritually circumcised by Jesus. I can deny the lusts and desires of my flesh in favor of the delights of my new nature. I have the choice.

All of this is illustrated in our text.

Joshua 5:1 So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who *were* on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who *were* by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.

The enemies of Israel were already defeated. Nevertheless they dug in and refused to surrender.

The same is true in your life as a Christian. The lusts and desires, the dispositions and tendencies, of your flesh have been defeated. But they are dug in deeply and refuse to surrender.

- being changed to bring change -

How do you defeat dug-in enemies that are already defeated? **By the spiritual surgery of circumcision!**

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because they did not obey the voice of the LORD—to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey."

Joshua 5:7 Then Joshua circumcised their sons *whom* He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

It appears that God had suspended circumcision during the wilderness wanderings until all the previous generation was dead. Uncircumcision was a sign to remind them that they were under God's discipline for their disobedience. Now that all the previous generation was dead and their children were in the land it was time to renew the covenant.

Circumcision was the last thing they ought to have done from a physical perspective. It rendered them totally incapacitated in the presence of their enemies. But it was also the very thing that must be done for them to know the victory God had promised them.

Circumcision is not a surgery we can elect to put off. It is surgery that has already been accomplished on God's elect by which we put off the flesh.

Every day you have instances where you can act or react from your flesh or believe it has been circumcised. It is often the thing you do not want to do. You feel it will somehow incapacitate you. But it's the thing that must be done for you to have real spiritual victory.

Let's say someone attacks you verbally. You can defend yourself; or you can return a blessing for their curses! You can grow bitter or be forgiving. You can be impatient or longsuffering. The list goes on-and-on.

The choice is yours. If you receive the biblical truth that you have been circumcised you will defeat your defeated enemies. No matter how deeply entrenched it may seem your flesh has been removed. It's applied by faith.

So much of your Christian life is practicing what is true of your position in Christ. Two word pictures in the text help us put circumcision into practice:

1. First, they were **circumcised** by a sharp knife. *So are we!* The Word of God is a precise surgical knife in the hands of the Great Physician. It is sharper than any two-edged sword and it is said to divide between the soul and the spirit. As you read the Word you see how you are to act and react as a new creation. Every command is an enabling from God to walk in newness of life. It cuts away your flesh and exposes the spirit.
2. Second, Joshua piled-up the foreskins. You and I need to have our own **hill of the foreskins**. You and I ought to have a pile going where we daily throw-off the lusts and desires of our flesh. Circumcision is not a surgery we can elect to put off. It is surgery that has already been accomplished on God's elect by which we put off the flesh.

No battle can be won, no enemy defeated, in your flesh. Realize you have been spiritually circumcised and let your weakness and incapacity be Christ's strength and victory.

#2 Circumcision Is A Spiritual Operation

You Don't Want To Reverse

(v8-9)

It sounds funny because we normally don't think of physical circumcision as being reversible. There are, however, both surgical and non-surgical procedures to restore the foreskin.

Spiritual circumcision is a one-time procedure. It was already done to you by Jesus Christ when you were saved.

But in our cases it can, in a sense, be reversed and the flesh restored. We can choose to ignore what Jesus has done for us and express our flesh. I can defend myself, demand my rights, refuse to

forgive, grow bitter and resentful. I can lust after and desire all sorts of sinful things.

I must therefore be willing to remain spiritually circumcised. Maybe the experience of the Israelites can teach me something.

Joshua 5:8 So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed.

Even though only the males were circumcised the text applies it to **the whole nation**. All of them benefited from it.

As a Christian I must remember I am part of something greater than myself. I am a member of the body of Jesus Christ on the earth. I am a stone in the building of the Church on the earth. My decisions and behavior affects others whether I want them to or not.

When I have a choice between the flesh and the spiritual I should think of my brothers and sisters in Christ. I should not be so selfish as to ignore how I affect them.

Let's get closer to home. The previous generation of Israelites refused to enter the Promised Land. Their fleshly fears had a profoundly negative impact on their children. It forced their children to wander in the wilderness with them and to watch them all die.

So, too, will my sin negatively affect my family and my children.

They stayed in the camp **until they were healed**. The word means *made whole*. The removal of the foreskin wasn't a loss. It required the removal of flesh in order to be made whole.

You and I are made whole, we achieve true humanness as it were, by denying the flesh. We lose nothing; we gain everything.

Joshua 5:9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.

The Israelites had been slaves in **Egypt** four hundred years. It was a **reproach** to them as a people. Now they were where they were supposed to be.

Egypt symbolizes the world to the Christian. Keith Green had a great song (and album), *So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt*.

*So you wanna go back to Egypt, where it's warm and secure.
Are you sorry you bought the one-way ticket when you thought you were sure?
You wanted to live in the Land of Promise, but now it's getting so hard.
Are you sorry you're out here in the desert, instead of your own backyard?*

*Eating leeks and onions by the Nile.
Ooh what breath, but dining out in style.
Ooh, my life's on the skids.
Give me the pyramids.*

*Well there's nothing to do but travel, and we sure travel a lot.
'Cause it's hard to keep your feet from moving when the sand gets so hot.
And in the morning it's manna hotcakes. We snack on manna all day.
And they sure had a winner last night for dinner, flaming manna soufflé.*

*So you wanna go back to Egypt, where old friends wait for you.
You can throw a big party and tell the whole gang, that what they said was all true.*

Maybe you got saved later in life after living out in the world. Maybe you've been saved your entire life and never really been in the world, so to speak. Either way it exerts a powerful pull. The whole world is like a big ad campaign designed to get you to buy-in to its lies. The devil uses it as a lure. Together the world and the devil appeal to your flesh to reverse your spiritual circumcision.

Egypt was a reproach to God's people. It was a place of slavery. So should we understand the world to us. Alternative lifestyles, illegal substances, lawful behaviors that nevertheless are unbiblical, do not bring us into freedom. They bring us into bondage. They make us slaves for whom Jesus Christ died to free. It is a reproach when believers are in the world. Let's stay where the reproach has been rolled away.

You are circumcised once when you are saved. That is your spiritual position in Jesus Christ. You apply it daily and put it into practice by denying your flesh in favor of your new nature.

In that sense you have a foreskin to throw on the [hill of the foreskins](#) every time you obey the Lord over your own lusts.

