

# Joshua 5

5:1 – What was the effect of God’s miraculous power on the nations?

5:2-7 – Why did they need to circumcise the men?

*“a second time”* does not refer to each man receiving the procedure a second time. “The circumcision was done ‘again...a second time.’ This phrase reflects the information given in vv. 4-5: when the Israelites had left Egypt, that generation of males had been circumcised, but they had died in the wilderness, and the practice had been neglected in the wilderness. Thus, it was necessary to do again, especially before the important celebration of the Passover” (Howard, 148).

Describe the experience and readiness of Israel’s army:

5:6 – Why did the last generation die off?

How did their punishment differ from Moses’ punishment (Deuteronomy 34:4)?

Before the circumcision, the Lord was already actively in their presence, performing miracles and communicating his Word, decrees, and direction. The ark (the symbol of God’s presence) went before them across the Jordan. All of this happened before they were circumcised. What does this teach you about the role, purpose, and significance of circumcision?

“Israel was not the only nation that practiced the rite: Jeremiah mentions Egypt, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and others as nations who practiced it but who were “uncircumcised in their hearts (Jer. 9:25-26)” (Howard, 148).

Circumcision would mark each Israelite as a member of God’s covenant people. Yet, many of the Israelites doubted God and an entire generation was killed off in the desert for their rebellion and doubt. One cannot equate circumcision with faith and salvation in the Old Testament. There have been differing opinions throughout church history regarding the connection between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament Baptism.

## Circumcision / Baptism

What is the purpose of baptism in the New Testament, and who should be baptized? (Acts 2:41; 8:36-38)?

What does it symbolize (Colossians 2:11-12 and Galatians 3:27)?

Baptism represents a new life given by Christ through faith. Baptism does not save, but is an outward expression of an inward work of salvation. Circumcision did not necessitate faith. *It was a way to unite an ethnic people, not a people of faith.*

Acts 16:31-33 – Some hold that the baptism of this “household” teaches that baptism does equate to circumcision and, therefore, baptism is simply a way of connecting families to God’s New Testament covenant people (assuming that some in this household were baptized without belief). The natural outcome of this position is that babies should be baptized representing their connection to God’s covenant people.

Several difficulties arise:

- There is an assumption taking place that the members of this household did not first believe. It is very possible that they did believe after hearing the miraculous work that God had performed and the message that was preached.
- Acts 16:31 indicates that there was a need for the household to “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” to be saved. Acts 16:32 teaches that the message was preached to the entire household before a baptism took place. Why would one not suppose that decisions of faith were made?
- Acts 2:41 – It was “those who accepted the message” who were baptized. They did not run home and grab their families or friends who did not accept the message to join in baptism. It seemed to be understood that faith preceded baptism.
- God is no longer working through a particular ethnic group, association is no longer a value – faith is the distinctive marker of God’s people.
- John 1:29-33 – The distinction between John the Baptist’s baptism and the one Jesus would provide was the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 2:38-39 – Those who were baptized would also receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not promised to just anyone baptized, even to show association with God’s people. He is a seal, a guarantee of salvation only for those who believe (Ephesians 1:13). Again, this must assume faith before baptism.

There are many other arguments on both sides. BCC does not perform infant baptisms, because we view Scripture as teaching believers' baptism. Our desire is not to represent a particular denomination, but to rightly divide and apply God's Word to the best of our ability.

5:8-9 – How would this time have reminded Israel of their own weakness and need for God?

9 – A good way of understanding this verse - "Thus, now that Israel was being so careful to obey God in every way possible culminating with the first observance of circumcision in a generation, God effectively put Israel's 'reproach' stage behind it, rolling it away. Israel was now making a new start, one in which neither Egypt nor any other nation could deride it from its God having seemingly abandoned it" (Howard, 152)

5:10-12 – Exodus 12:1-20 – What event does Passover celebrate? The Feast of Unleavened Bread?

How do we see Israel honoring the past and embracing the future?

How do the rituals and feasts help prepare the Israelites for a coming Messiah?

5:13-15 – How do these verses sound similar to Exodus 3:1-7?

Why would God want to give Joshua a similar experience to Moses?

How do the two experiences differ? How do these differences reflect the different stages of Israel's history?

Moses was called to lead God's people in a mass exodus, redeeming people out of the slavery in Egypt. Joshua was preparing to take a brand-new army to war against many nations. Moses needed a sign of God's presence, Joshua needed a sign of God's military power.

Who was this "**captain of the host**?"

## **OT Theophanies** (an appearance, though an incomplete manifestation, of God)

It would be inappropriate for Joshua to have fallen on his face in worship to an angel (Isaiah 42:8). The presence of an angel does not create a need for one to remove their sandals. The angel of the Lord walks with Israel throughout their history (Gen 16:10; 18:1; 22:12; 22:15; 31:11; 32:30; 48:16; Exodus 3:2; 3:6; 23:20-23; Judges 6:22; 13:21-22...).

It appears that these are instances where God meets with his people in a temporary form. The angel is identified with God, He has the power to give life, all-knowing, He can judge the earth and can forgive sin (all of which only God can do).

John 1:18 – *“No one has ever seen God at any time.”* How can this be possible and the above conclusion also be correct?

*“the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him”* – It seems that the first half of John 1:18 is referring to the Father, while it is the Son’s role to explain the Father.

As far as we can understand it, the Trinity has always existed as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each is distinctly and completely God while also having determined roles. In the New Testament Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15; 2:9; Hebrews 1:3); it would be reasonable to suggest that the Son has always represented, revealed, and explained the nature and character of the Father. Theologians and students of Scripture suggest that the appearances of “the angel of the Lord” as the pre-incarnate Christ interacting with His people.

The entire Old Testament is pointing to a coming Messiah. God’s promise to Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for all nations to be blessed through One who is to come, is the heartbeat that pounds in every book, chapter, and verse of the Old Testament. How does it change your view of Christ to view Him as the one who is directing and interacting with Israel throughout their history?

How does this help you understand his work and participation in your life?

How has this study of Joshua 1-5 continued to build your understanding of God’s character and attributes?

What are some of the major action points you have taken away from this study for yourself? For your involvement in the church?