

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The effect produced on the minds of the Canaanites by the late miracle, Joshua 5:1. Joshua is commanded to circumcise the Israelites, Joshua 5:2. He obeys, Joshua 5:3. Who they were that were circumcised, and why it was now done, Joshua 5:4-7. They abide in the camp till they are whole, Joshua 5:8. The place is called Gilgal, and why, Joshua 5:9. They keep the passover in the same place, Joshua 5:10. They eat unleavened cakes and parched corn, on the morrow after the passover, Joshua 5:11. The manna ceases, Joshua 5:12. The captain of the Lord's host appears to Joshua, Joshua 5:13-15.

Verse 1

The Amorites which were on the side of Jordan westward - It has already been remarked that the term Amorite is applied sometimes to signify all the nations or tribes of Canaan. It appears from this verse that there were people thus denominated that dwelt on both sides of the Jordan. Those on the east side had already been destroyed in the war which the Israelites had with Sihon and Og; with those on the west side Joshua had not yet waged war. It is possible however that the Amorites of whom we read in this verse, were the remains of those who dwelt on the east side of the Jordan, and who had taken refuge here on the defeat of Og and Sihon.

Verse 2

Make thee sharp knives - $\alpha\text{---}\alpha^{\text{a}}\alpha^{\text{TM}}\alpha^{\bullet}$ (charboth tsurim), knives of rock, stone, or flint. Before the use of iron was common, all the nations of the earth had their edge-tools made of stones, flints, etc. In the lately discovered islands this is found to be a common case. Our ancestors in these countries made their arrow and spear-heads of flint: these I have often seen turned up by the plough. But we cannot suppose that at the time here referred to the Israelites were destitute of iron, and were therefore obliged to use knives made of stone or flint, their different manufactures in the wilderness prove that they must have had both iron and steel. Why then use knives made of stone? Probably it was unlawful to use metal of any kind in this religious rite; and indeed this seems likely from the circumstance of Zipporah (Exodus 4:25) taking a sharp stone and circumcising her son; and we find, from the most ancient and authentic accounts, that the Egyptians considered it unlawful or profane to use any kind of metal to make incisions in the human body, when preparing it for embalming; see the note on Genesis 50:2, and on Exodus 4:25. That it was deemed improper to use any other kind of instrument in circumcision we have a proof in the tribe Alnajab, in Ethiopia, who follow the Mosaic institution, and perform the rite of circumcision, according to Ludolf, *cultris lapidibus*, with knives made of stone. - Hist. Aethiop., lib. iii., c. 1. And as God commanded the people to make him an altar of unhewn stones, on which no tool of iron had been lifted up, because this would pollute it, (see Exodus 20:25, and Deuteronomy 27:5), he might require that no instrument of iron should be used in a rite by which the body and soul of the person were in the most solemn and sacred manner dedicated to him to be his house and temple, the heart itself being the altar on which continual sacrifices to God must be offered. A physical reason has been given for preferring knives of stone in this operation, $\alpha\text{---}\alpha^{\text{a}}\alpha^{\text{TM}}\alpha^{\bullet}$ the wound suffers less through inflammation, and is sooner healed. $\alpha\text{---}\alpha^{\text{a}}\alpha^{\text{TM}}\alpha^{\bullet}$ For this a reason may be given. It is almost impossible to get an edge made so even and firm as not to leave particles of the metal in the incisions made even in the most delicate flesh; these particles would soon become oxidized by the action of the air, and extra inflammation in the part would be the consequence. The great aptitude of iron to be oxidized, i.e., to be converted to rust, is well known; but how far this reasoning, thus applied, may be supported by fact, I cannot pretend to determine: it is sufficiently evident that it was a common custom to use knives of stone in circumcision, and in all operations on those parts of the human body. I shall give a few examples. Pliny says, when they amputate certain parts they do it with a sharp stone, because nothing else could be employed without danger. *Samia testa virilitatem amputabant: nec aliter citra perniciem.* Ovid, *Fast.* lib. iv., ver. 237, relates a circumstance where the *saxum acutum*, or sharp stone, was used about those parts: - *Ille etiam Saxo corpus laniavit Acuto, Longaque in immundo pulvere tracta coma est. Voxque fuit, Merui; meritas dem sanguine poenas; Ah! pereant partes quae nocuere mihi; Ah! pereant; dicebat adhuc, onus inguinis aufert; Nullaque sunt subito signa relictia viri.*

This quotation is produced in order to prove that a knife made of a sharp stone was used in making incisions and amputations of certain parts of the body, even when the use of iron was well known; but a translation of the verse is not necessary, and would be improper. The *Mollia qui Rapta secuit Genitalia Testa*

of Juvenal (Sat. vi., ver. 513) is a farther proof of this. Many other proofs might be produced but those who wish

for more may consult Calmet and Scheuchzer.

Circumcise again the children of Israel the second time - This certainly does not mean that they should repeat circumcision on those who had already received it. This would have been as absurd as impracticable. But the command implies that they were to renew the observance of a rite which had been neglected in their travels in the desert: this is sufficiently evident from the following verses.

Verse 4

This is the cause why Joshua did circumcise - The text here explains itself. Before the Israelites left Egypt all the males were circumcised; and some learned men think that all those who were born during their encampment at Sinai were circumcised also, because there they celebrated the passover; but after that time, during the whole of their stay in the wilderness, there were none circumcised till they entered into the promised land. Owing to their unsettled state, God appears to have dispensed, for the time being, with this rite; but as they were about to celebrate another passover, it was necessary that all the males should be circumcised; for without this they could not be considered within the covenant, and could not keep the passover, which was the seal of that covenant. As baptism is generally understood to have succeeded to circumcision, and the holy eucharist to the passover, hence, in the Church of England, and probably in most others, no person is permitted to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper till he has been baptized.

Verse 8

They abode - in the camp, till they were whole - This required several days; see the notes on Genesis 34:24, Genesis 34:25. Sir J. Chardin informs us that when adults were circumcised they were obliged to keep their beds for about three weeks, or at least during that time they are not able to walk about but with great difficulty. The account he had from several renegadoes, who had received circumcision among the Mohammedans. Is it not strange that during this time they were not attacked by the inhabitants of the land, and utterly destroyed, which might have been easily effected? See the case of the poor Shechemites, as related in Genesis 34:24-31, with the notes there. Joshua, as an able general, would at once perceive that this very measure must expose his whole host to the danger of being totally annihilated; but he knew that God could not err, and that it was his duty to obey; therefore in the very teeth of his enemies he reduced the major part of his army to a state of total helplessness, simply trusting for protection in the arm of Jehovah! The sequel shows that his confidence was not misplaced; during the whole time God did not permit any of their enemies to disturb them. The path of duty is the path of safety; and it is impossible for any soul to be injured while walking in the path of obedience. But why did not God order them to be circumcised while they were on the east side of Jordan in a state of great security? Because he chose to bring them into straits and difficulties where no counsel or might but his own could infallibly direct and save them; and this he did that they might see that the excellence of the power was of God, and not of man. For the same reason he caused them to pass the Jordan at the time that it overflowed its banks, and not at the time when it was low and easily fordable, that he might have the better opportunity to show them that they were under his immediate care and protection; and convince them of his almighty power, that they might trust in him for ever, and not fear the force of any adversaries. In both cases how apparent are the wisdom, power, and goodness of God!

Verse 9

The reproach of Egypt - Their being uncircumcised made them like the uncircumcised Egyptians; and the Hebrews ever considered all those who were uncircumcised as being in a state of the grossest impurity. Being now circumcised, the reproach of uncircumcision was rolled away. This is another proof that the Israelites did not receive circumcision from the Egyptians; for they could not have considered those in a state of abomination, from whom they received that rite by which they conceived themselves to be made pure. The Israelites had this rite from Abraham; and Abraham had it from the express order of God himself. See Genesis 17:10 (note), and the note there.

The place is called Gilgal - A rolling away or rolling off. See the note on Joshua 4:19, where the word is largely explained.

Verse 10

Kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month - If the ceremony of circumcision was performed on the eleventh day of the month, as many think; and if the sore was at the worst on the thirteenth, and the passover was celebrated on the fourteenth, the people being then quite recovered; it must have been rather a miraculous than a natural healing. We have already seen from the account of Sir J. Chardin, that it required about three weeks to restore to soundness adults who had submitted to circumcision: if any thing like this took place in the case of the Israelites at Gilgal, they could not have celebrated the passover on the third or fourth day after their circumcision. The apparent impossibility of this led Mr. Harmer to suppose that they kept the passover on the

fourteenth day of the second month, the preceding time having been employed in the business of the circumcision. See his Observations, vol. iv., p. 427, etc.

Verse 11

They did eat of the old corn of the land - The Hebrew word **אֲבִיר** (abur), which we translate old corn, occurs only in this place in such a sense, if that sense be legitimate. The noun, though of doubtful signification, is evidently derived from **אָבַר** (abar), to pass over, to go beyond; and here it may be translated simply the produce, that which passes from the land into the hands of the cultivator; or according to Cocceius, what passes from person to person in the way of traffic; hence bought corn, what they purchased from the inhabitants of the land.

On the morrow after the passover - That is, on the fifteenth day; for then the feast of unleavened bread began. But they could neither eat bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, till the first-fruits of the harvest had been waved at the tabernacle; (see Leviticus 23:9, etc.); and therefore in this case we may suppose that the Israelites had offered a sheaf of the barley-harvest, the only grain that was then ripe, before they ate of the unleavened cakes and parched corn.

Verse 12

And the manna ceased - after they had eaten of the old corn - This miraculous supply continued with them as long as they needed it. While they were in the wilderness they required such a provision; nor could such a multitude, in such a place, be supported without a miracle. Now they are got into the promised land, the anathematized inhabitants of which either fall or flee before them, they find an old stock, and they are brought in just at the commencement of the harvest; hence, as there is an ample provision made in the ordinary way of Providence, there is no longer any need of a miraculous supply; therefore the manna ceased which they had enjoyed for forty years. The circumstances in which it was first given, its continuance with them through all their peregrinations in the wilderness, its accompanying them over Jordan, and ceasing as soon as they got a supply in the ordinary way of Providence, all prove that it was a preternatural gift. On the fourteenth of Nisan they sacrificed the paschal lamb: on the fifteenth, i.e., according to our calculation, the same day after sunset, they disposed themselves for eating it, and actually did eat it. On the morrow, the sixteenth, after having offered to God the homer, they began eating the corn of the country; and the seventeenth, the manna ceased to fall from heaven. What supports this calculation is, that the homer or sheaf was offered the sixteenth of Nisan, in broad daylight, though pretty late. Now the manna did not fall till night, or very early in the morning; so that it cannot be said to have ceased falling the same day that the Israelites began to eat of the produce of the country. - Dodd.

Verse 13

When Joshua was by Jericho - The sixth chapter should have commenced here, as this is an entirely new relation; or these two chapters should have made but one, as the present division has most unnaturally divided the communication which Joshua had from the angel of the Lord, and which is continued to Joshua 6:5. It is very likely that Joshua had gone out privately to reconnoitre the city of Jericho when he had this vision; and while contemplating the strength of the place, and probably reflecting on the extreme difficulty of reducing it, God, to encourage him, granted him this vision, and instructed him in the means by which the city should be taken.

There stood a man over against him - It has been a very general opinion, both among the ancients and moderns, that the person mentioned here was no other than the Lord Jesus in that form which, in the fullness of time, he was actually to assume for the redemption of man. That the appearance was supernatural is agreed on all hands; and as the name Jehovah is given him, (Joshua 6:2), and he received from Joshua Divine adoration, we may presume that no created angel is intended.

And Joshua went unto him - This is a very natural relation, and carries with it all the appearances and characteristics of a simple relation of fact. The whole history of Joshua shows him to have been a man of the most undaunted mind and intrepid courage - a genuine Hero. An ordinary person, seeing this man armed, with a drawn sword in his hand, would have endeavored to have regained the camp, and sought safety in flight; but Joshua, undismayed though probably slightly armed, walks up to this terrible person and immediately questions him, Art thou for us or for our adversaries? probably at first supposing that he might be the Canaanitish general coming to reconnoitre the Israelitish camp, as himself was come out to examine the city of Jericho.

Verse 14

But as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come - By this saying Joshua was both encouraged and

instructed. As if he had said, "Fear not; Jehovah hath sent from heaven to save thee and thy people from the reproach of them that would swallow thee up. Israel is the Lord's host; and the Lord of hosts is Israel's Captain. Thou thyself shalt only be captain under me, and I am now about to instruct thee relative to thy conduct in this war."

And Joshua - did worship - Nor was he reprehended for offering Divine worship to this person, which he would not have received had he been a created angel. See Revelation 22:8, Revelation 22:9.

Verse 15

Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, etc. - These were the same words which the angel, on Mount Sinai, spoke to Moses; (see Exodus 3:5-8); and from this it seems likely that it was the same person that appeared in both places: in the first, to encourage Moses to deliver the oppressed Israelites, and bring them to the promised land; in the second, to encourage Joshua in his arduous labor in expelling the ancient inhabitants, and establishing the people in the inheritance promised to their fathers. There is scarcely a more unfortunate division of chapters in the whole Bible than that here. Through this very circumstance many persons have been puzzled to know what was intended by this extraordinary appearance, because they supposed that the whole business ends with the chapter, whereas, it is continued in the succeeding one, the first verse of which is a mere parenthesis, simply relating the state of Jericho at the time that Joshua was favored by this encouraging vision. We may draw two useful reflections from the subjects of this chapter: -

1.As the manna had now failed, the people always greatly addicted to incredulity, might have been led to imagine that God had now given them up, and would be no longer in their armies, had he not given them this strong assurance, that the Angel of his presence should be with them as the guide and protector of the whole camp; for Joshua undoubtedly informed them of the encouragement he had received from the captain of the Lord's host.

2.By this vision he showed them that their help came from himself, and that it was not by human might or power, but by the Lord of hosts, they were to have the victory over all their adversaries; and he gave them the most convincing proof of this in the miraculous destruction of Jericho. By this means he continued to keep them dependent on his arm alone, without which dependence the spirit of religion could not have been preserved among them.