

Joshua 5:1-9 | Sunday August 23, 2026

As we begin to look at Joshua 5 it can be easy to miss how monumental of an event Israel crossing over the Jordan river truly is. The Jordan river crossing was a moment of faithful obedience for Israel and where God displayed His power in an amazing way. It was also the moment that God's people were finally entering into the Promised Land. A promise that is first mentioned all the way back in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1-3; 5-7 ESV

- (1) **Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.**
- (2) **And I will make of you a great nation,** and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
- (3) I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**
- (5) And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and **they set out to go to the land of Canaan.** When they came to the land of Canaan,
- (6) Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.
- (7) Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, **"To your offspring I will give this land."** So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 11 describes the Tower of Babel. God called humanity to be fruitful and spread out over the earth and fill it after the flood. In direct disobedience, humanity instead tried to stay together and build the tower to make a name for themselves. In judgment, God confused their languages, and they were scattered over the face of the earth. This is what makes the opening of Chapter 12 so amazing. **God reaches down and talks to Abram. At this time there is no Jew or gentile.** Ethnicities and cultures are just starting to form and diverge from each other. God reaches out to Abram and makes a promise: God will make him into a nation that will bless the entire world. **God is promising to create a people for the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to be born into.**

God just chose the man He will start a nation with and then promised to give land for this nation to exist in. Very slowly Abram's family grew to millions, with some trusting in God and His promises while most did not. While enslaved in Egypt, it was hard to think that this people group would ever become a nation. This is what makes Joshua 5 so monumental. God had made a nation from Abram, and now that nation stood in the very land that God had promised **to Abram 700 years before.** God remained faithful to His word and His promises for all these years. Israel crossing the Jordan proved that God was faithful to His covenant promise.

Joshua 5:1-5 ESV

- (1) As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, **heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan** for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, **their hearts melted** and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.
- (2) At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel **a second time.**"
- (3) So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth.

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

(5) **Though all the people who came out had been circumcised**, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt **had not been circumcised**.

When the inhabitants of the Promised Land heard about what happened at the Jordan River, they were terrified. Instead of arming their militaries and joining together against Israel, they cowered in fear. **God's first request of Israel in the promised land is for all the men to be circumcised**. The men who had come out of Egypt were circumcised, but this new generation who were born in the wilderness had not been. **God was calling the nation to return again to the practice of circumcision**. This request from God was the last thing Israel expected as they crossed the Jordan.

Joshua 4:12-13 ESV

(12) The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh **passed over armed before the people of Israel**, as Moses had told them.

(13) About 40,000 **ready for war passed over before the LORD for battle**, to the plains of Jericho.

When Israel crossed the Jordan, they had 40,000 armed men ready for battle to go in front of them. Israel expected immediate wars to await them on the other side of the Jordan. Instead, **God caused a fear to paralyze their enemies as He called for the nation to incapacitate their own military**. God had already provided a means to protect them due to the fear that had gripped the surrounding peoples. God's request to circumcise the men would go against all human logic and military strategy. Israel knew from its history how weak and susceptible to attack men were as they recovered from circumcision (Gen 34:24-25). Levi and Simeon used this trick to exact vengeance on an entire town. Now God was calling Israel to trust Him by becoming weak and open to attack in the Promised Land. To understand why God would request this at this specific time, we have to understand what circumcision was meant to be a remembrance of.

Genesis 17:7-8; 10-12; 14 ESV

(7) And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for **an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.**"

(8) And I will give to you and to your offspring after you **the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.**"

(10) **This is my covenant, which you shall keep**, between Me and you and your offspring after you: **Every male among you shall be circumcised.**

(11) You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and **it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.**

(12) He who is **eight days old** among you shall be circumcised. **Every male throughout your generations**, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,

(14) **Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.**"

Circumcision was practiced by other Near Eastern cultures but was used as a rite of passage from childhood into manhood. God instituted it for every Jewish male when they were 8 days old. God made an everlasting covenant, promise to Israel. **He promised to be their God and to give them the Promised Land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.** Circumcision was to be the sign or symbol of this covenant promise. If someone refused to accept circumcision, they were to be cut off from the people because they were refusing God's promises. The new generation needed to accept the mark of God's covenant promise as He was fulfilling it to them. **They were His people, yet they did not have the mark of being His people.** The next verses explain why this generation had not been circumcised.

Joshua 5:6-8 ESV

(6) For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, **the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore** to them that He would not let them see the land that the **LORD had sworn** to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

(7) **So it was their children, whom He raised up in their place,** that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, **because they had not been circumcised on the way.**

(8) When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.

The men who came out of Egypt had been circumcised. **They had the mark of God's promises, and yet in unbelief they refused to walk in these promises.** They refused to trust in what God swore to give them, so God swore that they would not be able to enter the land but it would be given to their children. In grief and disobedience, they attempted to take the land by force.

Numbers 14:39-45 ESV

(39) When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, **the people mourned greatly.**

(40) And they rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, "Here we are. **We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised,** for we have sinned."

(41) But Moses said, "Why now are you transgressing the command of the LORD, when that will not succeed?"

(42) **Do not go up, for the LORD is not among you,** lest you be struck down before your enemies.

(43) For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you, and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have turned back from following the LORD, **the LORD will not be with you."**

(44) But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although **neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp.**

(45) Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down **and defeated them and pursued them,** even to Hormah.

That generation refused to obey. They refused to trust that God would be powerful enough to give them the land, then they refused to accept His judgment. They were still focused on their own power and thought the Promised Land could be taken by their effort. They did not care that the ark did not go before them. They were quickly defeated. That generation struggled to understand that

their own effort and power would never be enough. **Apparently, they were so embittered about not being allowed to enter the Promised Land that they did not circumcise their children throughout their wanderings in the wilderness.** They had a mark of a promise that they would not get to enjoy, so they refused to give it to their children even though it was their children who would be the ones to enter the Promised Land.

The new generation was learning that God's promises were secured by trusting in Him and not through the power of the flesh. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant promises. It was to remind Israel that these promises would not be accomplished by the strength of their own flesh. God uses circumcision as a picture of what takes place for each believer.

Colossians 2:11-14 ESV

(11) **In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,**

(12) having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

(13) And you, who were dead in your trespasses and **the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him,** having forgiven us all our trespasses,

(14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. **This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.**

When we believe in Jesus, our body of flesh is put off. **Our flesh was dead and useless to walking in a new life.** Instead of our dead flesh, we are given new life in Jesus because He conquered sin at the cross and then rose again. He took our record of debt and its demand for death, and He paid it in full at the cross. Then He rose to new life so we can walk in a new life not reliant on our dead flesh. **The spirit filled life is walking in the new life that Jesus secured for us.**

John 6:63 ESV

(63) It is the Spirit who gives life; **the flesh is no help at all.** The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

We are given new life through the Holy Spirit. Our flesh is no help at all. Too often we read this verse and think the flesh is of some help, or at least a little help. We are like the first generation of Israel charging forward to enter the promised land on our own terms and in our own strength. **This is why we need to come back to the Word of God. God's Word is spirit and life.** His Word teaches us about the new life and defines what fellowship with Him looks like.

God had Israel come back to the sign of circumcision **to remind them of His promises, and to remind them that the flesh was no help in securing these promises.** Life in the promised land would only be possible as they relied on Him. The Wilderness Generation did not follow their parents but were obedient to enter the Promised Land and trusted in God to provide.

Joshua 5:9 ESV

(9) And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have **rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.**" And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

This new generation's faithfulness to trust God removed the reproach of their parents. Egypt watched what happened to Israel. The Egyptians had been completely undone by the God of Israel, and they took great delight that His people were wandering in the wilderness instead of enjoying

the Promised Land.

Numbers 14:13-16 ESV

(13) But Moses said to the LORD, **“Then the Egyptians will hear of it**, for You brought up this people in Your might from among them,

(14) and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. **They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people.** For You, O LORD, are seen face to face, and Your cloud stands over them and You go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

(15) Now if You kill this people as one man, **then the nations who have heard Your fame will say,**

(16) ‘It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that He swore to give to them that He has killed them in the wilderness.’

If the Israelites failed completely to enter the Promised Land, then God’s name would be mocked in Egypt and around the world. The nations had heard that God was in their midst, and if they could not enter the Promised Land, it would make God look weak. They would assume that Israel did not enter because God was unable to give the people the land He promised. **As Israel crossed the Jordan, God proved not only to His people but also to the world that He keeps His promises.** His promises are secured by His strength and not our own. This is a principle that was important for Israel to learn, and is important for us as believers today to learn.

Philippians 3:3-11 ESV

(3) **For we are the circumcision**, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus **and put no confidence in the flesh—**

(4) though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

(5) circumcised on the eighth day, **of the people of Israel**, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; **as to the law, a Pharisee;**

(6) **as to zeal**, a persecutor of the church; **as to righteousness under the law**, blameless.

(7) **But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

(8) **Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.** For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

(9) and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, **but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—**

(10) **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection**, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death,

(11) that by any means possible **I may attain the resurrection from the dead.**

Paul states that all believers are the circumcision, meaning the flesh has been removed and we are to rely on the new life in the Spirit. We are not **to put confidence in, depend on, trust in, or believe in our flesh**. Paul gives examples of the types of things we are so prone to rely on in our flesh. We might trust in our ethnicity, or culture as having strength. We might rest in our family and the prestige that comes from it. So often we trust in our own zeal, or efforts. **We think if we can secure our own righteousness, then maybe we would not have to rely as much on grace.**

We are called to count all these things as lost in comparison to Christ. Knowing Jesus and walking in fellowship with Him is far greater than anything our flesh can offer. **We have been given a righteousness and status with Jesus that depend entirely on faith in Him.** We are to trust in Him for salvation and then keep trusting in Him to walk in the new life. **Paul desires nothing more than to fully experience the resurrected life that Jesus has given to us.** He wants to experience the fullness of what it means to be resurrected in Christ.
