

## ***Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace***

### ***First Things***

Joshua 5:1-12

July 20, 2025

HDBC

Speed is one of the things we value in our culture. We like to get our food quickly. We like to get to our destination quickly. We like to accomplish our tasks quickly. We like to gain knowledge quickly. And we can!

Farmers can plant and harvest with much greater speed than before.

AI allows us to find answers to questions with much greater speed.

Amazon enables us to get things delivered much earlier than before.

Interstates allow us to drive further and quicker than before.

Cell phones enable us to communicate instantly around the world.

But not all things can or should be done with speed. There are times when we need to slow down and take one thing at a time.

If you've ever purchased a piece of furniture from Ikea you understand the importance of following instructions and of doing things in the correct order.

If you've tried to do step 4 before step 2 you've found that it doesn't end well. Step 2 prepares you for step 3, which prepares you for step 4, etc.

The Hebrew people crossed the Jordan river and are now in the land.

They've set up a memorial to commemorate the miraculous crossing.

Jericho and the rest of the cities and lie before them, ready to be taken. But they were not ready to attack. There were some things they needed to do first. It would be foolish for them to simply rush toward Jericho and start throwing spears. God had some ***first things*** for them to do.

That's what chapter five is all about. It is about preparation. But it was not the kind of preparation that one might expect. They were not going through six weeks of military training. They were not worried about strengthening their bodies through physical training. Nor were they going through classes outlining military tactics and strategies. The ***first things*** that needed to be

done were spiritually focused. There were some things that needed to take place in order to them to be prepared to take Jericho.

Most people don't like practice. But practice is essential. My football coaches used to say you'll play on Friday night like you practice on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Joshua understood the importance of **first things**. Notice four **first things** that needed to happen before they went to war.

## 1. The nations are restrained (1)

God had revealed himself through another miraculous act on behalf of his people, and the world took notice. We saw in chapter two how demoralized the Canaanites were with the rumors of what God had done through Israel.

He had **opened the Red Sea** for an entire nation to escape the land of Egypt. He had **preserved them through forty years** in the wilderness. He had worked through his people to **defeat the kings in Ammon and Moab**, east of Jordan. Now this nation was **camped at the doorstep of Jericho**, and the people were terrified.

**So terrified** were they that they did not even mount an attack on the invading nation. In WWII Germany did everything they could to keep the Allied army from establishing a beachhead in France. Hitler knew that the Allies were most vulnerable as they were landing on the beaches. Israel would have been most vulnerable as they crossed the river. Yet no attack came. This will become even more amazing when we see what happened next. The only explanation is that it was a God-thing.

## 2. The covenant is renewed (2-8)

Circumcision was a physical sign of the spiritual covenant relationship between God and the Hebrew people. It was established with Abraham and was to have been practiced with each generation.

The nation that came out of Egypt had observed this rite; the entire male population had been circumcised. But during the years they wandered in the wilderness the practice was forsaken. They no longer considered themselves a covenant people. This is interesting since Moses, himself was almost killed by God for not having circumcised his own sons. Exod. 4:24-26

While they were wandering in the wilderness because of their disobedience when they first came to the edge of the land and refused to go it, it was as if the covenant with God had been paused. Now that the generation of unbelievers had died, they were ready to enter into the promised land. In order to do so they needed to renew their covenant relationship with God. That required obedience to the outward sign of that relationship. That meant a surgical procedure for every male among the people. It would not be pleasant.

It seems very significant to me that the conquest of Canaan should have begun with pain. **Before Israel could draw the sword on their enemies, they had to draw the knife on themselves by renewing the practice of circumcision.**

This physical sign reflected a spiritual commitment. The Hebrews knew that **it signified far more than** a physical act; it was a spiritual act. It symbolized something real. Moses had said, in two of his great messages delivered on the plains of Moab, that they must be circumcised in heart as well as in body.

So the Jews knew that this was a sign of ownership. God, as it were, put his stamp of ownership, his seal, on each circumcised individual: **this person, these people belong to me.**

In the New Testament, under the new covenant there is also an outward sign of an inward faith in God for salvation. That is baptism. It is not an exact replacement of circumcision, but in some ways serves a similar purpose. The physical act of circumcision was not as important

as the heart commitment that it represented, but it was important. In a similar way, water baptism is not as important as the inward faith commitment to Jesus, but it is important.

If you are a born-again believer in Jesus and have not submitted to baptism as a reflection of your faith, you need to do so. In fact you are living in disobedience until you do so. If you are scared, trust God to give your courage. He will. Much like the Israelites needed to take care of this outward sign before they could move forward, so do you.

**Think about the timing of the circumcision.** There on the dangerous side of the river, with their enemies within striking distance all the males in the nation submitted to a surgical procedure. It would have been painful, and would have required time to rest and heal. They would be in no shape to go to war for a period of time.

Imagine yourself as an Israeli soldier who has just been circumcised, waiting to heal, looking at this city in front of you, and thinking, *Why couldn't we have done this on the other side of the river? We can't move for a few days, and if they come after us, we're sitting ducks."*

It was a **tremendous act of faith** to remain in their places, waiting to heal. Joshua had to exercise faith in performing this amazing act on all these men. The people had to wait, obey the Lord, and trust him even though they were weak, in pain, and vulnerable to attack at this time.

But the spiritual reality is that **in that weakness they were made strong**. Hebrews 6:12 describes the attitude of these people as it challenges us to be *imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*. Tremendous patience was required in waiting for this time of healing to be accomplished.

**Notice verse 9.** The scorn, the reproach that had followed the Hebrews around for forty years has been removed. No longer would they be the laughingstock of the nations. No longer would they be discounted as a

nomadic tribe of wanderers. Their forty years on the wilderness were over. They were about to become a force to be respected and feared. The reproach has evaporated and been replaced by respect and fear.

**Gilgal** was the name given to the first beachhead established by Israel. It means, *rolling away*, because it was there that God *rolled away* the reproach of Egypt and of their wanderings.

And whenever a Jewish family passed by that place, the kids would ask why it was called that. And the Jewish father and mother could explain to the children that this was the place where the shame and the indignity and the indecency of Egypt was rolled away, and they were given again the sign of their relationship with God.

### **3. The exodus is remembered (10)**

The Passover hadn't been celebrated since the giving of the law at Sinai, partly because the law required that men be circumcised to partake of Passover, and this new generation wasn't circumcised.

But this was an observance that Israel needed to re-institute in preparation for their conquest of the promised land. It reinforced their identity as God's chosen people, as the ones he had saved out of death and bondage, and brought to life.

### **4. The menu is expanded (11-12)**

Now in verses 11-12 something very dramatic happens as soon as Israel had restored the practice of circumcision and had celebrated Passover. They ate food from their new land and the manna which had sustained them in the wilderness stopped coming.

**God won't always do things the same way.** In the wilderness the people had learned to trust God for the provision of manna. Now they would be called to trust Him as they grew their own crops. Learning to live that way would have been difficult. Change is always tough.

**In the Sinai, there's not much food or water**, so the provision of manna became normative for the people. But God never intended for them to be fed that way forever. They were to grow and mature in their faith. In the new land they would work the fields & with the enablement of God would feed themselves. In a similar way, as we grow in our faith we are to take on more personal responsibility for our spiritual growth.

Not only this, by crossing the river and taking that step of faith, they would experience blessings that could not have been enjoyed on the other side of that step of faith. The produce of the new land far superior to the manna of the wilderness. Milk is fine for babies, but grown men and women enjoy a greater menu.

There is one more thing that needed to be done before attacking Jericho. We'll get to that next Sunday.

**Takeaways:**

1. Trust God when He calls you to pause and prepare.
2. Yield to God and complete His covenant signs.
3. Remember how He delivered you from sin and bondage.