

GOD CIRCUMCISED THE ISRAELITES AGAIN

Joshua 5:1-15

Key Verse: 5:2

"At that time the Lord said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.'"

In the last passage we studied how God trained the Israelites in obedience. God's command seemed unnecessary to General Joshua, to bring twelve stones from the middle of the River Jordan. Nevertheless, he said, "Yes, Sir." He had an absolutely obedient heart to God Almighty. After listening to God's command he said to his people sternly, "Choose one man from each tribe and go into the River Jordan and bring one stone for each tribe." It was indeed a command hard to obey. All the people of Israel had crossed the River Jordan by faith. Still they needed enormous courage and strength to overcome their fear. Then again, the command to bring out twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan where the priests who carried the ark stood was a totally impossible command to obey. But they obeyed God's command through General Joshua. When Joshua finished setting up the twelve stones at Gilgal, he taught them a sense of history by saying, "In the future when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and all the people of Israel crossed the River Jordan on dry land as Moses had crossed the Red Sea." To remember the historical facts was very important to the people of Israel. If they didn't remember what God had done for them, their hearts would be filled with the things of the world and they would gradually perish. In today's passage, God prepared his people practically as the soldiers of God who were supposed to destroy the

fortress of Jericho. Then soon they would conquer the entire territory of the Promised Land. Today, let's study what's most important for each of us to be the conquerors of our own lives as well as of our nation.

First, God commanded General Joshua to circumcise the people again (1-5). When the nations of Canaan heard that the Israelites crossed the River Jordan, what was their response? Verse one condenses their surprise, "Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all of the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites." Here we see their future victory before fighting when they obeyed the word of God Almighty. Until now all the people from all nations looked mighty big and strong in the eyes of the Israelites. When the twelve Israelite spies saw Canaan the first time, the land was flowing with milk and honey, but the people were too strong to conquer. Ten spies disheartened the Israelites because of their negative report. Joshua and Caleb gave convincing reports but the Israelites did not respond to them. As we studied, the Promised Land was like America—rich and vast and everywhere was so well cultivated. The land looked like it was flowing with milk and honey and was full of fruitful branches of vines, dropping down toward the ground. But now the people of the nations of the Canaanites were melted by fear because Almighty God divided the River Jordan. They tried to prepare for the upcoming warfare with the Israelites, but had no courage to face them. In this situation, the soldiers of Israel could be complacent and overconfident and possibly had lost the spirit of crossing the River Jordan.

God Almighty knew his people's spiritual condition, and called General Joshua and said, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites all over again." Actually there were many who had been circumcised, but God wanted them to be circumcised all over again. Circumcision was the sign of being God's covenant people. Circumcision was done to Father Abraham first and it has been done to all the Israelites after him as a sign of being God's people and as a sign of their identity as Israelites. Circumcision is very painful. It is because they have to cut the foreskin of the child-producing organ in the middle of the body, right under the bellybutton around eight inches down under. Of course, women do not have to be circumcised. But to the people of Israel, circumcision had immense importance to God and to themselves. Circumcision is very painful. After circumcision, they cannot go to the washroom freely, not to mention fighting against enemy soldiers. For a week's time they have to suffer from the pain of circumcision. Circumcision meant to consecrate oneself before God. Without having a right heart in the sight of God, no one can be victorious in his life. Furthermore, the Israelites had been in captivity in Egypt for 430 years, so it might be that they had lingering habits of slave mentality. Therefore, circumcision was necessary for them. But the timing seems to be wrong, because they were near the Jericho Fortress. It was the first fortress to the entrance of the Promised Land.

They had to be circumcised because all those who came out of Egypt—all the men of military age—died in the desert after leaving Egypt. All the people that came out of Egypt had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not. So, there were some who had been circumcised and there were some who had not been circumcised. The Israelites who came out of Egypt, out of

slavery did not obey God's daily bread training in the desert for forty long years. So all of them who came out of Egypt died in the desert, not seeing the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. The people of Israel who crossed the Jordan were their children. These children were mostly not circumcised. We have to think about why they had to be circumcised when they had to engage in a fierce battle to destroy the fortress of Jericho which was well-fortified. The people of Israel had never had battle or war experience. They were not really ready to fight and destroy the fortress of Jericho and next, to conquer the whole land of Canaan. This is the reason God circumcised them: to have a right attitude in the sight of God. After this event, the Israelites circumcised their children historically and traditionally. But it turned out to be habitual. So Paul said to the traditional Jews, "... Circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Ro 2:29). Circumcision of the heart is indeed necessary for each person to be victorious and fruitful as well as for every nation.

There was one shepherd in UBF at the beginning time of UBF. The shepherd was a man of thought and at the same time he was a man of a broken shepherd heart for his people. He started student ministry to fix up his country from a nation of beggar mentality to a nation of world conquest. But one problem happened to him in his heart. At that time he and many of his sheep were almost the same in age. So many girls called him, not "shepherd" but "brother." The problem was not the girls, but the shepherd himself. He felt his sheep were emotionally like brothers and sisters. The shepherd saw women as women. That was the big problem. So he came to God and asked for his help. Then God gave him John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the

sheep." He meditated on this quite a long time. "What is the meaning of being a shepherd?" Finally, God inspired him, "A shepherd cannot be a brother or sister to his sheep. He must be a spiritual father to them." As soon as this thought came to his heart, God circumcised his heart. God also changed his feeling toward women. The shepherd did not see women as women, but as spiritual daughters. Because of this, he earned great respect from all the women around him. These women began to work hard. Thus, UBF grew and grew. But several who saw the sisters as women failed to feed them with the word of God. Finally, they committed a great sin against God and it was a great disaster to UBF ministry. It is not easy to circumcise one's heart. It is very painful not to think of women as women. But if one has to be a shepherd he has to be a shepherd instead of being a sweet brother. May God circumcise our hearts as he circumcised the Israelites. In this way, God prepared the Israelites as soldiers of God at the critical time by circumcision.

Second, the Israelites celebrated the Passover at Gilgal (6-12)

. One evening on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

Why did they celebrate the Passover? It was to commemorate God's grace that he liberated them from the hand of Pharaoh. They were doomed to live in Egypt as slaves, but God had a great mercy on them and delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh through Moses. The Passover time is commonly the time of festivity. They had many kind of activities and they ate richly and abundantly after each festival. But eating was not the main point.

They kept the Passover to thank God for his deliverance. They rejoiced in their hearts, remembering the great act of God out of his great mercy.

It is important to remember God's grace and thank God and rejoice in what he has done for me and for the people of Israel as well as for the nation of America. But these days the Passover celebration is forgotten. Orthodox Jews keep the Passover. But there is a rumor that during Passover week they sleep late every day, eat brunch and omit lunch. As soon as the sun has set they begin to celebrate their Passover by eating \$400 dinners. These days the Passover has lost its meaning to the Jews as well as most Christians. These days they keep the Sabbath just like this. They get up late, eat brunch and fast during the daytime in order to fill up their stomachs with \$400 dinners. This cannot be a true activity before the Holy God. This cannot be an expression of God's mercy of deliverance from slavery. This cannot be an expression of thanksgiving to God.

In our Christian life we must remember God's saving grace by the precious blood of Jesus. Without remembering God's saving grace we cannot be thankful in our daily lives.

In our Christian life we must remember the day we were converted to be God's child through Bible study or some particular event. To remember God's saving grace through his Son's blood or to remember God's grace of conversion is very important and we must be thankful for that. Then God will always give us joy and peace, and prayer for ourselves and for others. Among us there are many inherited Christians. Because their parents are Christians, they also pretend to be Christians. They don't know God's saving grace through his Son's precious blood. They don't

know God's saving grace from the hand of King Pharaoh by Moses. They are very active, but they are not thankful.

The world is full of selfish people, but there are many who can be a blessing to others. There is one couple. The husband originally majored in music. His wife studied biochemistry and obtained a Ph.D. She published many research articles in a science magazine. She could have gotten a nationally famous university professorship. But in order to remain and support her husband as the Chicago UBF conductor, she did not move away from Chicago. Finally, she resigned her research position and moved near the Center. She wants to closely dedicate herself to the work of God. In this selfish generation, there are people like Jim Rarick's family. It is very common in America to be selfish. If we don't remember God's mercy of deliverance and if we don't remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we cannot but become selfish and inhuman. We cannot be a blessing to others.

America has enjoyed rugged individualism, but rugged individualism has turned out to be selfishness and deception and immorality. Where there is no God's mercy and no Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts, we cannot be happy even if we have money or fame. We must remember the Passover. We must remember by the grace of God that we passed over from death to life. We must remember that we passed over from being a selfish person to be a blessing. A selfish person and a man called to be a blessing are quite different in their personal lives.

Third, the Holy Ground (13-15). So many people from so many countries want to immigrate to the United States. So the US immigration officers

in many places all over the country are the most suffering people among American government officials. Many people from poor countries think that America is a paradise. They come to America and live in their ethnic groups. Most of them are happy even if they are cleaners or laundry men in their fantasy that they are living in America. They don't care how their children grow and become perverts and adulterers. There is no paradise in the world. Even if America is the only super power nation and exercises its power to small and poor nations, people don't care about what a super power nation ought to be. The Nobel Prize committee nominated President Bill Clinton as one of the candidates for the Peace Prize. Generally, contemporary people are pragmatical, but we cannot deny that they are thoughtless. When we think about high school kids and elementary and seventh and eighth grade students' immoral activities we feel that we are in the wrong place for world mission.

But from God's point of view, America is Holy Ground. There God is present and God is ruling this country to make it a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. When General Joshua crossed the Jordan River and thought about fighting against the Canaanite nations, he might have thought he was in deep trouble to conquer the promised land and the Canaanite nations were cursed. But God sent the Commander of the Lord's army and told General Joshua, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Here we learn that whatever our situation is, no matter where we live, we must think that it is holy ground. When God wanted to send Moses to deliver his people from the hand of Pharaoh, Moses was in deep despair and he thought he was a nobody. He thought the land where

he lived was cursed land. But God called him and said, "Take off your sandals. The place where you stand is holy ground." Whatever we do and whatever situation we might be in, we must think, "This is God's Holy Ground." Then God will richly bless you and make you a blessing.