

The Book of Joshua, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Circumcision, Passover, and the Commander of the Lord's Army

Joshua 5:1–15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson presses one truth before all others, that God consecrates His people before He commissions them for battle. The danger in handling Joshua 5 is two-sided. On one side a teacher may bind Old Testament circumcision or the Passover on Christians, which Scripture never does, since these belonged to the Old Covenant that is fulfilled and taken out of the way in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17). On the other side a teacher may treat the chapter as a mere ceremony to skip past on the way to Jericho. Both miss the point. Draw the timeless principles (consecration, covenant identity, remembrance, and gratitude), and where it is natural, point them forward to their fulfillment in Christ, the circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28–29; Colossians 2:11–12) and Christ our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Do not read New Testament baptism anachronistically back into Israel's circumcision, but do let the gospel light shine on the shadow.

The heaviest block of the lesson is the Commander of the Lord's army (Joshua 5:13–15). Handle this divine appearance reverently. Joshua worships, and the Man does not refuse worship but accepts it and declares the ground holy, exactly as the Lord did at the burning bush. This is no ordinary angel. Many faithful students understand it as a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son, and that is a defensible reading, but do not be dogmatic about it. Keep the clear and certain point front and center, that the battle and the victory belong to the Lord. Joshua is not told which side God is on, he is told to get on God's side, sandals off, face down.

Aim past information toward formation. The student should leave not merely knowing the order of events in Joshua 5 but having let the Lord ask, 'Are you consecrated to Me? Do you remember what I have done? Will you trust My provision? And will you let Me be the Commander?' That is the spiritual work this chapter does, and the teacher's task is to make room for the Lord to do it.

Question 1

Student Question:

At Gilgal God renews the covenant sign of circumcision on a new generation before any battle is fought (Joshua 5:2–9). What does this tell us about God's priorities, that He cares first about His people belonging to Him before He cares about what they will accomplish?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joshua 5 opens by noting that the Canaanite kings' hearts melted when they heard the Jordan had dried up (5:1), so this is the moment Israel could have struck while the enemy was paralyzed by fear. Instead God calls a halt. The timing is deliberate, and it teaches us that God's priority is not military advantage but covenant fitness.

Circumcision was the sign God gave Abraham, the mark in the flesh of belonging to the covenant people (Genesis 17:9–14). The generation born in the wilderness had not received it, a quiet token of the years under God's discipline. Before the conquest, God renews the sign so that the people who inherit the promise carry the mark of the promise.

The point for our students is the ordering of God's concerns. He cares first about who His people belong to, then about what they will do. A church or a Christian eager to accomplish great things for God should hear this. God is far more invested in our consecration than in our conquests, and He will often slow us down at Gilgal until the matter of belonging to Him is settled.

Be careful here to draw the timeless principle of consecration and covenant identity without binding circumcision itself on Christians. Under the New Covenant the true circumcision is of the heart (Romans 2:28–29; Colossians 2:11–12). The flesh-mark belonged to the Old Covenant, but the principle endures, that God sets His people apart for Himself before He sends them out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's priorities run opposite to ours; we ask what we will accomplish, He asks first whether we belong wholly to Him.
- Consecration precedes commission throughout Scripture; the Lord prepares the worker before He gives the work.
- Do not bind Old Testament circumcision on Christians; it belonged to the Old Covenant, now fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:11–17).
- The timeless principle is covenant identity and being set apart for God, fulfilled for us in the circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:28–29).
- God's discipline in the wilderness was real, yet His covenant faithfulness brought a new generation to the very edge of the promise.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it say about God that He pauses an entire army at the edge of battle to attend to the matter of who they belong to?
- Where do we, as a congregation, feel the pull to rush toward accomplishment before we have settled the matter of consecration?
- How does the move from circumcision in the flesh to circumcision of the heart in Christ deepen, rather than cancel, this lesson?

Question 2

Student Question:

Circumcision marked Israel as a people set apart for God. In what specific area of your life right now is the Lord asking you to be visibly set apart and consecrated to Him, even before you see any 'victory' come from it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Circumcision was a visible, costly, set-apart mark. It said, in the body itself, 'I belong to the Lord and to His people.' The Lord still calls His people to be visibly set apart, not by a mark in the flesh, but by lives that plainly belong to Him (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 12:1-2).

Notice that the consecration came before any victory. Israel was set apart at Gilgal with Jericho still standing, undefeated. Consecration is not a reward we earn after success; it is the posture we take before God acts, trusting Him with the outcome.

Press the student toward specifics. Vague intentions to 'be more committed' rarely change anything. Ask each one to name an actual area, a relationship, a habit, the use of money or time, where the Lord is asking for visible, set-apart obedience now, before any fruit is in sight.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Being set apart for God is meant to be visible in how a Christian actually lives, not merely an inner sentiment (Matthew 5:14-16).
- Consecration comes before victory, not after; we give ourselves to God while the Jericho still stands.
- Genuine surrender is always specific; the Spirit usually presses His finger on one concrete area at a time.
- Avoid turning consecration into self-improvement; it is belonging to the Lord, presented as worship (Romans 12:1).

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific area where you sense the Lord asking you to belong to Him visibly right now?
- Why is it harder to consecrate ourselves before we see results than after?
- How can this class help one another follow through on a concrete act of consecration this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

God says, 'This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you' (Joshua 5:9), and names the place Gilgal. What 'reproach' had clung to Israel, and what does it reveal about God that He rolls away the shame of His people Himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The 'reproach of Egypt' (5:9) most likely refers to the shame Israel carried as a people who had been slaves, and who had wandered forty years under judgment, an unconsecrated, uncircumcised generation. To the watching nations and even to Egypt, Israel's God may have seemed unable to finish what He started. At Gilgal, God removes that reproach.

Notice who does the rolling away. God says, 'This day have I rolled away the reproach.' The people did not earn it off; the Lord lifted it. The very name Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew for 'roll,' a permanent marker in the land that God is the one who removes His people's shame.

This reveals God's heart toward His people's disgrace. He does not leave them defined by their past failures and humiliations. He restores their standing and gives them a fresh name on the ground itself. The God of the second chance is on full display.

Point gently forward. The deepest reproach, the shame of sin, is rolled away not by flint knives but by Christ, who bore our shame and cleanses us (Hebrews 12:2; 1 John 1:7). Draw the timeless truth of God lifting His people's reproach, and let it find its fullness in the gospel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God Himself rolls away the reproach of His people; restoration is His gift, not our achievement.
- God does not leave His people defined by past failure, slavery, or shame; He renews their standing.
- The deepest reproach, the shame of sin, is finally taken away in Christ, who despised the shame for us (Hebrews 12:2).
- Personal accountability still stands; God lifts shame from the repentant, not guilt from the unrepentant (Ezekiel 18:20).

Discussion Prompts

- What does the name Gilgal, the place of 'rolling away,' teach us about how God deals with His people's shame?
- How is the rolling away of reproach different from simply being told to forget the past?
- Where do you see this same heart of God toward shame fulfilled in the work of Christ?

Question 4

Student Question:

Is there a 'reproach' or old shame from your past that you have let define you, when the Lord has been offering to roll it away? What keeps you holding onto it instead of receiving His cleansing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Many believers live as though some old shame is a permanent part of their identity, a slavery they cannot leave behind. Like Israel, they have crossed into new ground but still carry the reproach of Egypt in their hearts. The Lord stands ready to roll it away.

Distinguish carefully between unconfessed sin, which must be repented of, and forgiven sin whose shame we keep rehearsing. For the repentant believer, to keep wearing the reproach God has lifted is to doubt His word of cleansing (1 John 1:9; Psalm 103:12).

Help the student name what holds the shame in place. Often it is pride, the sense that we must punish ourselves, or a quiet unbelief that God's grace really covers this. Naming it honestly is the first step to letting the Lord roll it away.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgiven shame that we keep rehearsing dishonors the God who has already removed it (Psalm 103:12).
- There is a difference between godly repentance over sin and a self-punishing shame that refuses grace (2 Corinthians 7:10).
- Holding onto reproach is often quiet unbelief that God's cleansing is enough.
- Receiving cleansing is itself an act of faith and worship, trusting God's word over our feelings.

Discussion Prompts

- Is there an old shame you have let define you, even after bringing it to God?
- What keeps you from receiving the cleansing the Lord has already offered?
- How would your daily walk change if you truly believed the reproach was rolled away?

Question 5

Student Question:

Israel keeps the Passover on the plains of Jericho (Joshua 5:10), remembering the night God spared them and brought them out of Egypt. Why does God so often anchor His people in remembrance before He leads them forward, and what does faithful remembering guard us against?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel keeps the Passover (5:10) before marching on Jericho, the feast that retold the night God spared the firstborn and brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 12). On the threshold of the future, God roots them in the past. Before they take new ground, they remember the God who has carried them this far.

Remembrance guards God's people against two great dangers, ingratitude and self-reliance. A people who forget what God has done begin to imagine they have arrived by their own strength,

and they grow cold toward Him (Deuteronomy 8:11–18). Faithful remembering keeps the heart humble and thankful.

This pattern runs all through Scripture. God gives feasts, stones of remembrance, and ordinances precisely because His people forget. He knows the human heart drifts, so He builds in rhythms that call us back to what He has done.

Point forward where natural. Christ gave His church the Lord's Supper as a regular act of remembrance (1 Corinthians 11:23–26), kept on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Without binding the Passover on Christians, show that the principle of remembrance is honored and fulfilled in the table of the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God anchors His people in remembrance before leading them forward; gratitude for the past fuels faith for the future.
- Forgetting God's works breeds pride and self-reliance (Deuteronomy 8:11–18); remembering keeps the heart humble.
- The Lord builds rhythms of remembrance into the life of His people because we so easily forget.
- The principle of remembrance finds its New Covenant fulfillment in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Acts 20:7).
- Do not bind the Old Covenant Passover on Christians; draw the timeless principle of grateful remembrance.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God so consistently call His people to remember before He calls them forward?
- What does forgetting God's past faithfulness do to our courage for what is ahead?
- How does the Lord's Supper carry forward this same work of remembrance for the church?

Question 6

Student Question:

What rhythms of remembrance has the Lord given you, and are you keeping them as living worship or letting them grow into empty routine? Where do you most need to remember what God has done before you take your next step?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord has given His people regular rhythms of remembrance, gathering on the first day of the week, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and the reading of His Word. The question is whether these are kept as living worship or have hardened into routine we go through without our hearts (Isaiah 29:13).

Ask the student to consider where remembering is most needed in their own life right now. Often we are tempted to step into a new challenge having forgotten how God carried us through the last one. Deliberate remembering steadies us.

Encourage honesty. Many faithful church members can confess that their observance of the Lord's Supper or their daily time with God has slid into habit. Naming that is not failure; it is the doorway back to worship that means something.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Acts of remembrance can decay into empty routine when the heart is disengaged (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8).
- Remembering God's past faithfulness is fuel for present courage and obedience.
- The Lord's Supper, prayer, and Scripture are given as living rhythms, not mere obligations.
- Honest self-examination is the first step back to wholehearted worship (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Discussion Prompts

- Which of your rhythms of remembrance has quietly become routine, and how might it become worship again?
- What has God done for you that you most need to remember as you face what is ahead?
- How can keeping the Lord's Supper each week steady your faith for the coming days?

Question 7

Student Question:

The morning after the Passover, Israel eats the produce of the land, and 'the manna ceased' (Joshua 5:11–12). What does it reveal about God's faithfulness that His provision changed its form, from bread out of heaven to bread out of the land, yet never once failed His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The morning after the Passover, Israel eats the produce of Canaan, and 'the manna ceased' (5:11–12). For forty years bread had fallen from heaven every morning; now it stops, not because God's care ran out, but because His people had entered the land of promise. The provision changed form; it never failed.

This is a quiet but profound revelation of God's faithfulness. We tend to identify God's care with the particular way He has provided in the past, the manna, the job, the season, the relationship. When the form changes, we panic, as if God Himself were withdrawing. But the same God who fed them in the wilderness now feeds them from the land.

Help students see that God's faithfulness is constant even when its expression changes. The manna ceasing was not a loss; it was a graduation. The God of the wilderness and the God of the land are the same God, and His provision is exactly suited to where His people are.

There is gratitude embedded here too. The 'old corn of the land' was the firstfruit of a promise forty years in the waiting. God's people finally tasted what He had pledged to their fathers. Faithfulness fulfilled is worth savoring with thanksgiving.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's provision may change its form, but His faithfulness never fails His people (Philippians 4:19).
- We often confuse God's care with one particular means of it, and grow anxious when the means changes.
- The manna ceasing was not abandonment but the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise.
- Tasting the firstfruits of God's promise calls for gratitude, not entitlement (Deuteronomy 8:10).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so unsettling when God's provision changes from a familiar form to a new one?
- What does the manna ceasing teach us about trusting the Giver rather than clinging to the gift?
- Where have you seen God provide in a new way after an old way came to an end?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where are you gripping tightly to one form of God's provision and quietly afraid of what happens if it stops? How would it change your peace to trust that the God who fed you in the wilderness is the same God who will feed you in the land?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Many of us quietly tie our security to one particular form of God's provision, a paycheck, a person, a role, a season of life, and grow afraid at the thought of it ending. The fear underneath is that if this stops, God's care for me has stopped.

The cure is not to grip the gift more tightly but to anchor in the Giver. The God who fed Israel with manna for forty years did not abandon them when the manna stopped; He had bread from the land ready. The same God stands behind every season of your life.

Invite the student to name the specific provision they are clutching with fear. Bringing it into the light, and consciously trusting that the faithful God will provide in whatever form the next season requires, is how the grip loosens and peace returns (Matthew 6:31-33).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fear often comes from trusting a form of provision rather than the God who provides it.
- Peace grows when we anchor in the unchanging Giver, not the changing gift (Hebrews 13:8).
- Naming our fear honestly before God is the path to trust and rest (Philippians 4:6–7).
- Seeking first God's kingdom frees us to trust Him with the daily 'bread' (Matthew 6:31–33).

Discussion Prompts

- What form of God's provision are you gripping out of fear that it might stop?
- How would your peace change if you trusted the Giver more than any single gift?
- What would it look like this week to seek first His kingdom and trust Him for the rest?

Question 9

Student Question:

A Man with a drawn sword meets Joshua and says, 'as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come,' and Joshua falls down and worships on holy ground (Joshua 5:13–15). What does this divine appearance teach us about whose battle the conquest really is, and what does it mean for us that the Commander tells Joshua not which side He is on, but that Joshua must get on His side?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As Joshua surveys Jericho, a Man stands before him with a drawn sword (5:13). Joshua's question is natural for a general, 'Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?' The answer overturns the question entirely, 'Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.' The right question was never which side God is on, but whether Joshua is on God's side.

This is plainly a divine appearance, not an ordinary angel. Joshua falls on his face and worships, and the Commander accepts the worship and declares the ground holy (5:14–15), commanding Joshua to remove his sandals. This is the very word given to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). A created angel refuses worship (Revelation 22:8–9); this Commander receives it. The Lord Himself has come.

Many faithful students understand this as a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son, and that is a reasonable and reverent reading. Hold it without dogmatism. What is beyond question is the central truth, that the battle for Jericho belongs to the Lord. The true Commander of the army has already taken the field before a single trumpet sounds.

This reframes everything that follows. When Jericho falls, no Israelite will be able to boast. The Commander came first; the victory was His. Joshua's task was not to recruit God to his cause but to submit, sandals off and face down, to the One whose battle it always was. The holiness of God and the lordship of God over the conflict stand at the very center of the conquest.

Draw the timeless application with care. We are not promised the conquest of cities, and the Christian's warfare is spiritual, not physical (2 Corinthians 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:10–18). But the principle stands unshaken, the victory belongs to the Lord, and our part is humble, worshipful submission to the Commander rather than enlisting Him in our plans.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The battle and the victory belong to the Lord; He is the true Commander before Israel ever lifts a sword.
- This is a divine appearance: the Commander receives worship and declares the ground holy, as the Lord did at the bush (Exodus 3:5).
- Created angels refuse worship (Revelation 22:8–9); that this Commander accepts it marks Him as divine.
- Many reverently understand this as a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son; hold the view without dogmatism.
- The right question is not whose side God is on, but whether we are on His; we submit to Him, we do not recruit Him.
- God's holiness is central; Joshua removes his sandals and falls on his face before the conquest begins.
- For the church the lesson is spiritual; our warfare is fought in Christ's strength, and the victory is His (Ephesians 6:10–18).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so significant that the Commander refuses to take Joshua's side and instead calls Joshua to His?
- What evidence in the text shows this is a divine appearance and not an ordinary angel?
- How does knowing the victory belongs to the Lord change the way we face our own spiritual battles?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way Jesus is forming you through it. Where is He calling you to be consecrated, to remember, to trust His provision, or to fall on your face and let Him be the Commander instead of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring the whole chapter to bear on the student's own walk. In Joshua 5 the Lord consecrates His people, roots them in remembrance, changes the form of His provision without ever failing them, and reveals Himself as the true Commander. Each of these is a place where Christ is at work forming the believer.

Resist the vague answer. Press for one specific thing. Is Jesus calling this student to be consecrated in a particular area? To remember His faithfulness before a daunting step? To trust His provision through a change? To get off the throne and let Him be the Commander of some battle they have been trying to win alone?

This capstone question is where formation, not just information, takes hold. The goal of the lesson is not that the student knows the order of events in Joshua 5, but that they leave having let the Lord do one real thing in them, sandals off, face down, belonging wholly to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The aim is transformation into the likeness of Christ, not merely knowledge of the passage (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- Genuine response is specific and personal; one concrete step matters more than broad resolve.
- Christ forms His people through every facet of this chapter: consecration, remembrance, trust, and submission.
- Falling on our face before the Commander is the posture from which all real obedience flows.

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of Joshua 5 did the Lord press most directly on your heart, and why?
- What is one specific way Jesus is forming you through this passage this week?
- Where is He asking you to take your sandals off and let Him be the Commander?