

AT GILGAL

Joshua 5

This lesson may be begun without special introduction as the story of the final arrival of the Israelites at their destination. The death of Moses, the succession of Joshua, and the Lord's charge to Joshua (Joshua 1:7-9) will come in naturally. The story of the crossing of the Jordan and the setting up of the twelve stones at Gilgal tie in with the first verse of the chapter.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord alone can control our spiritual enemies.

Every place mentioned in the Word has a special meaning.

When we begin to regenerate, we must continue to study in order to make spiritual progress.

Circumcision corresponds to purification of the heart from self-love.

Notes for Parents

Finally, after forty years, the children of Israel were led to the brink of the Jordan River with the Holy Land before them. All the rebellious men had died—Moses last of all just before they reached Jordan. Only Joshua and Caleb were left. The young people had grown up and Joshua was now their leader. When we have followed the leadership of Moses—the law of the Lord—long enough so that the orderly outward life has become habitual with us and all our rebellious feelings and thoughts have died out, we are ready for a new state.

Everyone recognizes the Holy Land in the Bible story as a symbol of heaven. What they do not always recognize is that heaven begins in this world. If we do not, while we are in this world, develop the kind of character which is heavenly, we shall not choose to live in heaven after we die. The Lord, when He was in the world,

said, “Ye must be born again.” We are born children of the world. We must become children of God by learning about our heavenly Father and cultivating in our own hearts and minds the qualities of unselfish love and true wisdom which we find in Him. This is regeneration, for which the conquest of the Holy Land stands. The enemies in the Holy Land are the evils and falsities which are in our own hearts and minds.

The Lord parted the waters of Jordan, as He had parted those of the Red Sea, so that the Israelites could pass through. If we obey the Lord, He will always open the way before us. Their first encampment in the Holy Land was at Gilgal, a word which means “rolling,” and verse 9 of our chapter tells us that it was so called because there the Lord “rolled away the reproach of Egypt” from them. In Egypt they were slaves. Now they were free men with a country of their own. In John 15:15 the Lord says to His disciples, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” When we enter the Holy Land of a regenerate state, we no longer look back with longing to our bad habits, obeying the Lord unwillingly and without understanding. We set out eagerly under a fighting leader to hunt down and destroy our inward foes.

But there are things we must remember, and our chapter is a reminder of these. We must continue to obey the commandments, which never change. Read Joshua 4:1-5, 20-24. We must keep our outward lives clean (verses 2-8). We must be grateful to the Lord for our deliverance (verse 10). We must plant in our minds the seed of truth from the Word, cultivate it, and harvest the good grain (verses 11-12). And we must remember that the regenerate life is a holy life, put off the worldly ideas in which we naturally walk, and use the truths of the Lord to fight our inner selfishness (verses 13-15).



Primary

For this age level we have included the last few verses of chapter 4 instead of the first part of chapter 5, as the setting up of the stones will interest the children and they are not old enough for the lesson on circumcision. They should learn the names Joshua and Gilgal and what Gilgal means. Something should be done to review the Passover lesson in connection with verses 9 and 10, and the teacher should be sure the children know about the manna.

In order to enter the Holy Land the people had to cross the Jordan River.

It was springtime, and the river was in flood.

Do you remember how they had crossed the Red Sea?

Now the Lord parted the waters of Jordan for them in the same wonderful way.

Before they crossed, the Lord had told Joshua to appoint one man from each of the twelve tribes, telling each of them to pick up a stone from the bed of the river as they went through it. Let us read what they did with these stones at their first camping place in the Holy Land, and then read some of the other things that happened there. [Read Joshua 4:19-24 and 5:9-16.]

What was the name of their first encampment in the Holy Land?

Why was it called this?

What feast did they celebrate there?

What can you tell about this feast?

How had the Lord fed them every day in the wilderness?

What happened at Gilgal with regard to the manna?

Who afterward appeared to Joshua at Gilgal?

What did Joshua ask him?

What did he answer?

What did he tell Joshua to do?

Junior

The Junior notes suggest an adequate approach to the lesson by way of a reminder of the story of the spies and an account of the death of Moses and the charge to Joshua. Have the children look up and read the Bible references in their notes. The order of events at Gilgal should be learned.

Why did the people not go into the Holy Land when they first came near its border?

What was their punishment for not trusting the Lord?

What two men were to be exempt from this punishment?

It was forty years before all these older people had died. Moses himself was the last to go. When finally the pillar of cloud and fire led them again to the southern border of Canaan, Moses was allowed to see the Promised Land from the top of Mount Nebo. Then he died, and we are told in Deuteronomy 34:6 that the Lord “buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” He was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, and it is said: “His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.” *Deuteronomy*, the “repetition of the law,” is the last of the five books of Moses, which are called the *Pentateuch*.

The book of Joshua, from which our lesson for today is taken, tells the story of the conquest, division, and settling of the Holy Land itself. In the very first chapter of Deuteronomy, verse 38, Moses has told the people that Joshua is to be his successor as their leader. The first chapter of Joshua, verses 7-9, tells of the Lord’s charge to Joshua after the death of Moses, when He told him to “observe to do according to all the law,” and to “meditate therein day and night,” and ended: “For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest.” Joshua was a fighting leader. You remember we first heard of him when he led the fighting men of Israel in the battle with Amalek at Rephidim, and he and Caleb were the two spies who told the people at Kadesh that they ought to go ahead and conquer the land because, no matter how strong the enemies were there, the Lord was with them and would give them the victory.

There is one incident in the crossing which you may not remember, but which is important for our lesson today. Read Joshua 4:1-5, 19-24. You remember that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob built altars to the Lord in various places, both for worship and to remind the people of all the Lord had done for them. And Moses built an altar at Rephidim after the victory over Amalek. And now

one of the first things Joshua does in the Holy Land is to set up these twelve stones at Gilgal as a memorial of the miracle performed by the Lord at Jordan. Gratitude to the Lord for the many blessings He brings us should be in our hearts always.

Now read Genesis 17:9-12, which tells of the beginning of the rite of circumcision among the Jews back in the time of Abraham. The Israelites had continued to observe this rite throughout their history until they entered the wilderness. Then it was neglected, and Joshua knew that it must be resumed if he was to keep the law. Baptism takes the place of circumcision for the Christian Church.

What was the name of the first encampment of the Israelites in the Holy Land?

Gilgal means “rolling.”

Why was it given this name?

What feast did the people observe at Gilgal?

What does verse 11 say they ate the day after the Passover?

What stopped on the same day?

Why do you think it stopped?

We want to remember these things which happened at Gilgal, for they were all a necessary preparation for the conquest; and we want to notice the beginning and end of our chapter, too. The protection and power of the Lord were clearly with Joshua from the beginning. In fact, the name *Joshua* means “savior” and its Greek form is *Jesus*.

Gilgal remained the headquarters of the Israelites for some time, for after the conquest of the cities of Jericho and Ai we find it said of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:6: “And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal.” The rolling away of the reproach of Egypt, from which Gilgal took its name, was the final firm establishment of the children of Israel as a free people in the land which had been promised to their fathers.

Intermediate

The difference in correspondence between the wilderness journey and the

conquest of the Holy Land should be made clear and the difference in our own attitude during reformation and regeneration. The place of the law in each state and the manner of the Lord's dealing with us is an important lesson. The connection with the two Christian sacraments should be stressed. The teacher—knowing his pupils—should decide beforehand just how much to say about circumcision. He should be prepared with a simple answer to a possible question about it so that he will not be caught off guard and in doubt as to what to say.

The wilderness journey pictures the period of reformation, the time when we are trying to put our outward conduct in order in obedience to the law of the Lord. Moses represents the law as it appears to us at this time. It seems harsh and we do not like to obey it any more than the Israelites enjoyed obeying Moses. We stay in this state of reformation until doing right becomes a habit and all our rebellious thoughts and feelings die out, just as the Israelites had to stay in the wilderness until all those who chose to listen to the ten cowardly spies had died. Then Moses dies. This does not mean that we no longer need to obey the law of the Lord, but the law has ceased to appear harsh. We see it now as our friend and protector, something to be followed with confidence and courage. Joshua, the “truth fighting,” has become our leader. Read the Lord's charge to Joshua in Joshua 1:7-9.

At the time of our lesson for today the Israelites have crossed the Jordan—which the Lord parted miraculously for them as He had at the Red Sea—and are finally in the Holy Land itself. The conquest of the Holy Land, of which the book of Joshua treats, pictures the process of regeneration, the time when we are trying to discover and overcome not just our outward bad habits but the evils and falsities which are in our hearts and minds. We do this not from fear of punishment or from hope of reward but because we have begun to love to serve the Lord and are eager to make ourselves all that He wants us to be.

The first encampment of the Israelites in the Holy Land was called Gilgal, a word which means “rolling,” and verse 9 of our chapter tells us why it was so named. Egypt, we remember, pictures the plane of external knowledge and in a bad sense—when

the Egyptians held the Israelites in slavery—it means worldliness. We are all naturally worldly—inclined to think of this world and success in it as the important thing in life—and this “reproach of Egypt” is not rolled away from us until we are ready of our own accord to follow the Lord’s truth as leader.

Several interesting things happened at Gilgal. First Joshua set up there the twelve stones which had been picked up from the bed of the Jordan as the people crossed (Joshua 4:1-5, 20-24). The Jordan as the boundary of the Holy Land represents the introductory truths of the regenerate life. The setting up of the twelve stones from Jordan at Gilgal as a memorial emphasizes our need never to forget this part of the Lord’s charge to Joshua: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” We never reach the point when we no longer need to read and study the Word and to keep the commandments.

Then Joshua was commanded to circumcise all the children of Israel. Circumcision signified to the Jews that a person was of their own church, and they had been told to circumcise every male child when he was eight days old. But they had neglected this rite all through the wilderness journey. Circumcision represents purification from selfish and worldly loves, and Swedenborg tells us that the sacrament of baptism takes the place of circumcision for the Christian Church.

After the circumcision at Gilgal the next they did was to celebrate the Passover. We remember that the Passover feast was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year as a memorial of their deliverance from Egypt; so their arrival in the Holy Land had been timed by the Lord to coincide with the beginning of a new year. In the Word the time when a thing happens is always important; it is never accidental. For the Christian Church, the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper takes the place of the Passover. So you see we learn from our chapter that baptism and

the Holy Supper are the orderly basis on which we begin a regenerate life.

Then on the day after the Passover the manna ceased. The manna represents goodness from the Lord provided for our gathering day by day when we are trying to do right from a sense of duty. The people had been fed with it throughout their wilderness journey. At times they got very tired of it, as we learn from Numbers 21:5, but they could not live without it. When they entered the Holy Land, however, the barrenness of the wilderness was behind them. Now they could eat immediately “of the old corn [produce] of the land” and presently they would be sowing seed and raising their own grain. In the regenerate state there is goodness which is lasting, which does not—as the manna did—melt when the sun comes up or spoil if we try to keep it.

Finally Joshua has a vision of the Lord in the form of an angel with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua was to be a fighting leader and was to have great success, but he was never to forget that it was the Lord who gave him all his power. Our chapter begins with the statement that the enemies of Israel in the Holy Land were brought into a state of weakness and fear not by the strength of the army of Israel but by the fact that the Lord had parted the Jordan for their passage. And in the end of the chapter Joshua is told to take off his shoes because the ground is holy. Our shoes, spiritually speaking, are our natural ideas in which we walk from day to day. If we are to regenerate—to be “born again”—we must see and acknowledge and never for a moment forget that it is from the Lord alone that we receive power to overcome our spiritual foes, and that a heavenly character is not mere morality and the kind of good works which bring us respect and praise in the world. Heaven is “holy ground,” made so not by us but by the presence of the Lord.

Basic Correspondences

Jordan = introductory truths
circumcision = purification from selfish and
worldly loves

shoes = natural ideas of goodness

Senior

The Seniors are nearing the age at which regeneration may begin, for regeneration is an adult process. They should learn from the events in this chapter just what the difference is between reformation and regeneration and what the essential basis of regeneration is. Stress the need for humility, for knowledge of the fundamental truths of the Word and of doctrine, for continual study of the Word, and for recognition of the importance of the sacraments.

Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who had stood out against the other ten and against the whole congregation when the people were afraid to trust the Lord and to undertake the conquest forty years before, were the only two men to enter the Holy Land out of all the adults who had crossed the Red Sea under Moses. It was a new generation for whom the Lord performed a similar miracle at Jordan.

So we can see immediately one explanation of verse 9 of our chapter for today (Gilgal means “rolling”). All through the wilderness journey the people had been looking back to Egypt, remembering the good things about their life there and forgetting the bad, because they were rebellious in the face of hardship and danger. This is a picture of our state when we are in the period of reformation, the time when we are trying to make our outward conduct over into the order required by divine law. We look back to certain pleasures we had before we decided to reform, forgetting the hard experiences which led us to the decision to reform, and we rebel against the principles which are leading us on. But if we persist our rebellion dies out a little at a time, until finally the law of the Lord is no longer a harsh taskmaster but a stirring leader. Moses is dead, and Joshua—the truth fighting—has taken his place.

The conquest of the Holy Land, which the book of Joshua tells us about, is the period of regeneration. We are born again. We feel ourselves to be really children of God going forward in His name and in His strength to overcome the deeper evils and falsities within

ourselves which stand in the way of our possession of the Holy Land—a heavenly character. In the book of Joshua we find the people making occasional mistakes, one case of flagrant disobedience, and a falling short of the full conquest because of cowardice, but no more looking back to the purely worldly standards pictured by Egypt, and no more complaint and rebellion.

The crossing of the Jordan began a new life for the Israelites. The entrance upon regeneration begins a new life for us. But we should recall the Lord's charge to Joshua in Joshua 1:7-9, which shows what is required of us, and our whole chapter for today is a solemn reminder that we are to go forward in the Lord's strength, not in our own.

The first item in this reminder is found in verses 19 to 24 of the preceding chapter. Joshua had been told by the Lord to have one man from each of the twelve tribes pick up a stone from the bed of the Jordan as they crossed. These twelve stones were then set up at Gilgal, their first encampment in the Holy Land, as a memorial of the miraculous crossing. The Jordan represents the introductory truths of the Christian faith, which we must never forget. We need indeed to study them continually.

Our chapter begins with the statement that the enemies in the Holy Land became weak when they learned how the Jordan had been parted by the Lord for the passage of Israel. It is recognition of the Lord's power to save which shows us the actual weakness of our spiritual enemies.

Then Joshua was ordered to circumcise the people. Circumcision represents cleansing from selfish and worldly lusts. It is the recognition that our natural will is not good but evil, and that goodness comes from the Lord alone as we obey Him. Circumcision was a rite which was specifically enjoined upon the Jews but had been neglected throughout the wilderness journey. When we are in the rebellious state of reformation, we are not willing to admit that our natural desires are evil. You will see in the quotation at the end of this lesson why baptism takes the place of circumcision for the Christian Church.

After the circumcision the Passover was celebrated. This again was a reminder that it was the Lord who had delivered them from the Egyptian state of bondage. In the Christian Church the Lord's Supper takes the place of the Passover.

Then on the day after the Passover the manna ceased, because they could now eat "of the old corn [produce] of the land." When we are in the reformation period, the goodness which is represented by bread and which gives us the strength to go forward cannot in any way be produced or preserved by us, because we are still in the state in which our constant desire is not to obey but to turn back to self and the world. In that state the Lord has to supply us day by day with just enough goodness to carry us through the temptations of the day. We must gather this in the early morning of each work day by looking to the Lord for it, but we cannot store it up. We do not understand it. You remember that *manna* means "What is it?" But when our rebellious thoughts and desires have died and we have been "born again," we understand what genuine goodness is and where it comes from, and we can begin to plant the seed of truth, to develop and eat the good grain, and to store it up in our permanent character, although it still is the Lord's and not ours.

The last three verses of our chapter—Joshua's vision of the Lord as a man of war and his recognition that the ground on which he stood was holy—is the final summing up of all these reminders designed to keep us progressing spiritually by means of the Lord's truth toward the stature which He wishes us to attain.

Adult

This is a wonderful chapter in which to bring out the completeness of detail with which the Lord gives us our instruction in the Word. The basis of regenerate living is all here. Nothing is omitted and nothing given here can be neglected.

The entry of the children of Israel into the Holy Land pictures the beginning of the period of regeneration as distinguished from

the period of reformation. If we continue to follow the pillar of cloud and fire—if we obey the commands of the Lord as they come to us in the Word—our regrets and rebellions will die away one by one and we shall actually reach the point at which the Lord can give us a new will which is good. This does not mean that the old selfish will is gone and that we have no more work to do. Swedenborg tells us (AC 3200) that our regeneration must go on throughout this life and to eternity in the other, for an individual “can never be perfected.” But with the beginning of regeneration our rebellion is over. We are consciously and willingly on the Lord’s side, and the Lord’s power is so obvious to us that the promptings of the old selfish will and the falsities which linger in our minds—the enemies in the Holy Land—are weakened and can be controlled. As the first verse of our chapter says of these enemies, “their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more.” This is true in this world and we are promised that in heaven, if we attain it, our inherited nature is held in complete check by the Lord so that we are never conscious of it unless we begin to become overconfident and need a momentary reminder that it is still there. The conquest of the Holy Land describes our progress in regeneration in this world rather than in heaven, however. In the book of Joshua, although we find no more looking back or rebellion, we do find mistakes in judgment, one outstanding case of disobedience, and in most places in the land a weakness in accomplishment. But, as verse 9 tells us, “the reproach of Egypt is rolled away” (*Gilgal* means “rolling”). We are no longer obeying Moses in fear, much as we formerly obeyed Pharaoh, but are free men. In the language of the Gospel: “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

It is significant that in the Bible the beginning of every new state is marked by the setting up of an altar of some sort as a “memorial,” a reminder for future generations. It was an entirely new generation which entered the Holy Land under Joshua, and the

first thing Joshua did was to set up at Gilgal the twelve stones which had been taken from the bed of the Jordan as they passed over. Read Joshua 4:1-5, 20-24.

Next Joshua was commanded to circumcise all the people. We are told in the writings that “circumcision is a sign of purification from filthy loves,” and we read in AC 4462: “As the foreskin covers the genital, in the Most Ancient Church it corresponded to the obscuration of good and truth, but in the Ancient Church to their defilement. For with the man of the Most Ancient Church, who was an internal man, good and truth could be obscured but not defiled; whereas with the man of the Ancient Church, being a comparatively external man, good and truth could be defiled, because it is external things—that is, external loves—which defile. For this reason they who were of the Most Ancient Church knew nothing of circumcision, but only they who were of the Ancient Church. From this church circumcision spread to many nations; and it was not enjoined upon Abraham and his descendants as anything new, but merely as a discontinued rite that was to be restored; and it became to his posterity a sign that they were of the church.” Circumcision had been neglected during the wilderness journey because in the period of reformation we are concerned with our outward conduct and unwilling to face the necessity of self-examination and inward change. But this is one of our first duties when regeneration begins.

Then after the circumcision at Gilgal the feast of the Passover was celebrated. From the beginning of regeneration we must recognize and acknowledge that it is the Lord who has delivered us from bondage to the world and the flesh. And we recall that in the Christian Church the Holy Supper takes the place of the Passover feast. So our chapter for today should bring home to us the fact that the two Christian sacraments were ordained by the Lord as the orderly beginning of the regenerate Christian life. We cannot omit or neglect them without interfering with our spiritual progress. Through them the Lord reaches us in inner ways, and even though we may not be conscious of this presence of the Lord, we

know it is a fact. We should observe these two sacraments because they have been commanded by the Lord, if for no other reason. The Lord knows our needs better than we know them.

After this celebration of the Passover at Gilgal we read that the people ate the produce of the land and that the next day the manna ceased. When the Lord has been able to give each of us a new will, we can be given something of His goodness as our own, with a feeling that we have a part in developing and preserving it. Our desire to partake of His goodness is expressed when we eat the bread of the Holy Supper. The manna in the wilderness is the form in which alone the Lord's goodness can come to us before regeneration—a little at a time, just enough to give us strength for the immediate need, melting away when the sun of self-love grows hot, spoiling when it is not put to immediate use, and never understood. We recall that *manna* means “What is it?” The grain of the Holy Land is lasting goodness, developed with our willing and conscious cooperation from the seed of truth from the Word, and wholly satisfying.

Our chapter closes with the appearance to Joshua of an angel with a drawn sword who commands Joshua: “Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.” Joshua represents “the truth fighting.” If we are to make progress in regeneration, we must accept the challenge of the “captain of the host of the Lord.” We must recognize that the regenerate life is a holy life and put off the materialistic ideas in which we are accustomed to walk and go forward to battle against our inward foes under the leadership of the sword of divine truth.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 700¹⁴: “As the waters of Jordan signified truths that introduce they were commanded to take up out of the midst of it twelve stones, and carry them over to the first place where they passed the night, and this because ‘stones’ signify truths, and ‘twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of Israel’ signified the truths of the church. Joshua set up those stones in Gilgal to the east of Jericho, because ‘Gilgal’ signified the

doctrine of natural truth, which is serviceable for introduction into the church.”

True Christian Religion, n. 674: “When churches are viewed in the order of their succession from ancient times to the present, it will be seen that the former churches were external, that is, that their worship consisted of externals which represented the internals of the Christian church which was founded by the Lord when He was in the world, and which is now for the first time being built up by Him. That which primarily distinguished the Israelitish church from the other churches in Asia, and afterward from the Christian church, was circumcision. And because, as before said, all things of the Israelitish church, being external, prefigured all things in the Christian church, which are internal, so the especial sign of that church was interiorly like the sign of the Christian church; circumcision signifying the rejection of the lusts of the flesh, and thus purification from evils, and baptism having the same signification; from which it is clear that baptism was commanded in the place of circumcision, in order that the Christian church might not only be distinguished from the Jewish, but also might thus be more clearly recognized as an internal church.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. How long did the Israelites wander in the wilderness? *forty years*
- J. Where did Moses die? *Mount Nebo*
- P. Who succeeded him as leader? *Joshua*
- P. How did the Israelites cross the Jordan? *miracle*
- P. What did they take from the bed of the river? *twelve stones*
- P. What was done with these twelve stones? *made monument*
- P. What was their first encampment in the Holy Land? *Gilgal*
- J. What does *Gilgal* mean? *rolling*
- J. Why was it called that? *“I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt”*
- J. What rite was Joshua commanded to observe at Gilgal? *circumcision*
- P. What feast did they celebrate there? *Passover*
- P. What is said about the manna? *it stopped*
- J. Why did they no longer need it? *ample food there*
- J. What vision did Joshua see? *angel with sword*
- J. What did the angel say of himself? *captain of God’s army*
- J. What did he tell Joshua to do? *take shoes off*
- I. What is pictured by the wandering in the wilderness? *reformation (reordering life)*

- I. What is pictured by the entrance into the Holy Land? *beginning of real spiritual living*
- S. What is the difference in representation between (1) Moses, and (2) Joshua?
 - (1) *truth obeyed through fear*
 - (2) *truth fighting in our lives*
- S. What two things were done at Gilgal which prefigure (1) baptism, and (2) the Holy Supper?
 - (1) *circumcision (purification rite)*
 - (2) *Passover (memorial of salvation)*