

PREPARING TO ‘CONQUER’ CANAAN

JOSHUA 1:1 – 5:12

¹After the death of Moses the servant of YHWH, YHWH spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, ²"My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites.

³Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses.

⁴From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory.

⁵No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. ⁹I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for YHWH your God is with you wherever you go."

The death of 'Moses, the servant of YHWH' is recorded in the final chapter of Deuteronomy (34:5). Joshua is introduced in Exodus as Moses' assistant (see Exodus 24:13). Israel as a 'people' ('ām) is a key theme in Joshua, as it is in Deuteronomy:

You are a people holy to YHWH your God; YHWH your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

– Deuteronomy 7:6

Likewise the theme of the land as a gift from YHWH:

See, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land that I swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them.

– Deuteronomy 1:8

However, the land is not an outright gift. YHWH retains ownership – indeed the whole world is his, but he gives it to Israel that they may enjoy its blessings. As in Deuteronomy (see 11:24), the land is defined as stretching from the Negeb in the south to Lebanon in the north, and in a north-easterly direction taking in the fertile crescent as far as the Euphrates. This is the extent of Solomon's kingdom in the understanding of post-exilic Judah (see 2 Chronicles 9:26) and this was the kingdom that Josiah dreamed of re-creating.

Verses five to seven echo words spoken to the people by Moses:

No one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them.

– Deuteronomy 7:24

On YHWH's promise 'I will be with you' (1:5) see the commentary on Deuteronomy 31:6, page 190. On the call to be strong (1:6, 9), see the texts quoted on pages 216-217. Joshua's success depends on his being faithful to the teaching of Moses. This is the criterion by which all future leaders will be judged.

On the land as promised to their ancestors see Deuteronomy 6:3, page 81 and 26:19, page 171.

Verses seven to nine echo the instructions for the king:

When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear YHWH his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel.

– Deuteronomy 17:18-20

‘Law’ in verse seven and verse eight translates *tôrâ*, a ‘teaching’ that reveals God’s will. Here, as in Deuteronomy, it covers the decalogue, revealed to the people on Horeb, and written on tablets of stone by YHWH, as well as the ‘statutes and edicts’ revealed to Moses by YHWH and delivered by Moses to the people in the plain of Moab before his death. Moses wrote these (see Deuteronomy 27:3, 8; 28:58; 31:9) in the ‘book of the law’ (Joshua 1:8) referred to towards the end of Deuteronomy (see page 193):

When Moses had finished writing down in a book the words of this law to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of YHWH, saying, ‘Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of YHWH your God; let it remain there as a witness against you.’

– Deuteronomy 31:24-26

Verse eight is echoed in the first psalm:

Happy are those whose delight is in the law of YHWH. On his law they meditate day and night.

– Psalm 1:1-2

The promise of success and prosperity, like all the promises of blessing in Deuteronomy (see page 176), is necessarily simplistic. The aim is to attract people to obey. The Deuteronomists are quite aware that there is no direct relationship between prosperity and goodness (see Deuteronomy 9:4-6). Experience demonstrates that the good suffer. In the tradition of the Deuteronomic School the death of king Josiah must have profoundly shaken any simplistic notions people might have had in regard to goodness and being blessed. However, it is also true that blessings were often experienced as flowing from living a good life, and this is the central point that is being made here. If they ‘meditate on the book of the law day and night, so as to be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it’ (1:8), they are assured of YHWH’s presence and blessing, even when things do not appear to be going well.

¹⁰Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, ¹¹"Pass through the camp, and command the people: 'Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that YHWH your God gives you to possess.'"

¹²To the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, ¹³"Remember the word that Moses the servant of YHWH commanded you, saying, 'YHWH your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.' ¹⁴Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan. But all the warriors among you shall cross over *in battle array* before your kindred and shall help them, ¹⁵until YHWH gives rest to your kindred as well as to you, and they too take possession of the land that YHWH your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land and take possession of it, the land that Moses the servant of YHWH gave you beyond the Jordan to the east."

¹⁶They answered Joshua: "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may YHWH your God be with you, as he was with Moses! ¹⁸Whoever rebels against your orders and disobeys your words, whatever you command, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."

This is Joshua's first act as God's appointed commander. The people in the highlands of Canaan did not become free without a fight. When, as the story is told here, Joshua commands those in charge of mustering the people to tell them to 'prepare your provisions' (1:11), it is primarily military preparedness that he speaking of. This becomes clear in verse fourteen when the fighting men are told to cross over 'in battle array' (*hāmūš*).

Verses twelve to eighteen repeat Deuteronomy 3:12-20 (see also Numbers 32). There must be some quite significant reason why Reuben is named as Jacob's first born in the tradition. Did the Reuben tribe (along with Gad and Manasseh) play a leading role in the liberation of the high country, and only afterwards choose to transfer to the more spacious territory of Transjordan? The Book of Judges witnesses to the presence of Israelites in Transjordan. Their dominance there, however, belongs to the tenth and ninth centuries BC.

The Transjordan Israelites are portrayed as the first to publicly accept Joshua as Moses' successor and as their commander-in-chief.

If we think of the emergence of Israel beginning in the hill country, the adhesion of Jericho (2:1) and its environs would have come later. However, since the story begins dramatically with the crossing of the Jordan it is appropriate that it would begin with a story that relates to Jericho, in the tribal territory of Benjamin (see map page 246). The story may have been preserved in the nearby sanctuary of Gilgal. We were prepared for this at the end of Deuteronomy when YHWH invited Moses to ascend Mount Nebo which is described as being ‘across from Jericho’ (Deuteronomy 32:49; 34:1), ‘the city of palm trees’ (Deuteronomy 34:3).

The tale was perhaps told to explain how the family of Rahab survived. After all Matthew’s Gospel witnesses to a tradition that has her as the great-great-grandmother of king David (Matthew 1:5). The reason for its inclusion here is found in verses nine to eleven in which a non-Israelite sees clearly that YHWH is the Lord of history. She must have been a popular figure in Jewish imagination, for she is mentioned in two other New Testament texts. She is offered as an example of faith (Hebrews 11:31), for the reason given above, and James uses her as a model of a person who put her faith into action (James 2:25).

‘Shittim’ (2:1) is not mentioned in Deuteronomy. It features twice in Numbers (see Numbers 25:1; 33:49). The word means ‘acacias’, which provided welcome shade on a hot plain nearly half a kilometre below sea level. The two spies go to the local inn where they meet Rahab, a prostitute (zōnâ, 1:1). The ‘king’ of Jericho is concerned – an example of the threat which egalitarian Yahwism posed to the small military elites that exercised economic and social control throughout Canaan.

If, indeed, this story is based on memory, then we have to add that dramatic imagination has also played a part. The walls of the city of Jericho were destroyed centuries before the emergence of Israel in Canaan. In the final decades of the twelfth century BC Jericho would have been at best a quite small town. It is unlikely that it could have been sealed by a ‘gate’ (2:7), or the kind of wall mentioned in verse twelve.

¹Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. ²The king of Jericho was told, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.” ³Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land.” ⁴But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. ⁵And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them.” ⁶She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. ⁷So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

⁸Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof ⁹and said to the men: "I know that YHWH has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. ¹⁰For we have heard how YHWH dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. YHWH your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.

¹²Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by YHWH that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith ¹³that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." ¹⁴The men said to her, "Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when YHWH gives us the land."

This act of faith on the lips of Rahab accounts for the insertion of this story into the Book of Joshua.

In verse nine she recognises that the 'conquest' of Canaan is not the result of Israel's military might, but of the will of YHWH who has given Israel the land.

The Canaanites have heard of the action of YHWH in redeeming Israel from Egyptian slavery. Apart from that the focus is entirely on Israel's victories in Transjordan. Once again this points to the Gilgal sanctuary which faced east across to the territories of the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og. These victories would have been recounted with delight in the Gilgal sanctuary.

Rahab's final statement of faith echoes the words of Moses:

Acknowledge today and take to heart that
YHWH is God in heaven above and on the
earth beneath; there is no other.

– Deuteronomy 4:39

Rahab asks them to swear to deal with her and her family in a 'kind way' (2:12, 14, *ḥesed*). This is the only time this word is found in Joshua. It occurs three times in Deuteronomy, always in reference to YHWH's faithful commitment to the covenant (Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9, 12).

She also asks for a sign of 'good faith' (*'emet*, 2:12). Verse fourteen combines both expressions (*ḥesed w^c 'emet*) – a combination that is not found elsewhere in Joshua or in Deuteronomy. It is found in four Genesis texts (24:27, 49; 32:10; 47:29), and in the classical text of Exodus where YHWH is described as:

a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (*ḥesed w^c 'emet*).

– Exodus 34:6

It is normal that stories take on a life of their own and are handed down in different ways. In one version of the story the rope is to enable escape (2:15). In the other it is a sign to the Israelites to spare Rahab and her family (2:17-21). This is the last we hear of the 'crimson cord'.

¹⁵Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the outer side of the city wall and she resided within the wall itself. ¹⁶She said to them, "Go toward the hill country, so that the pursuers may not come upon you. Hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned; then afterward you may go your way."

¹⁷The men said to her, "We will be released from this oath that you have made us swear to you ¹⁸if we invade the land and you do not tie this crimson cord in the window through which you let us down, and you do not gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your family. ¹⁹If any of you go out of the doors of your house into the street, they shall be responsible for their own death, and we shall be innocent; but if a hand is laid upon any who are with you in the house, we shall bear the responsibility for their death.

²⁰But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be released from this oath that you made us swear to you." ²¹She said, "According to your words, so be it." She sent them away and they departed. Then she tied the crimson cord in the window.

²²They departed and went into the hill country and stayed there three days, until the pursuers returned. The pursuers had searched all along the way and found nothing.

²³Then the two men came down again from the hill country. They crossed over, came to Joshua son of Nun, and told him all that had happened to them. ²⁴They said to Joshua, "Truly YHWH has given all the land into our hands; moreover all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us."

The report to Joshua echoes the words of Rahab (2:9).

¹Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. ²At the end of three days the officers went through the camp ³and commanded the people, "When you see the ark of the covenant of YHWH your God being carried by the levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, ⁴so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it."

⁵Then Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow YHWH will do wonders among you." ⁶To the priests Joshua said, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on in front of the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went in front of the people.

The key to reading chapters three and four is found at the conclusion:

The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.

– Joshua 4:19

The text is liturgical and witnesses to a cultic re-enactment at the sanctuary of Gilgal of the entrance into Canaan of 'the ark of the covenant of YHWH your God' (3:3). The ark is mentioned fifteen times in chapters three and four. The text celebrates the entrance of the divine king, YHWH, and his chosen subjects into his realm. It celebrates also the entrance into Canaan of the covenant: the new way of being a people that is special to Israel and that was to permeate the hill country of Canaan. It is probable that the liturgy is based on the memory that this new way of looking at God and of living in community came to Canaan from across the Jordan.

'Shittim' (3:1) has already been mentioned (see 2:1). The Jordan has already been named six times, and is named a further twenty-eight times in chapters three to four. In the same two chapters the verb 'cross over' occurs twenty-times. Obviously the key focus of these chapters is crossing the Jordan.

The ark of the covenant is a symbol of YHWH's presence and of the covenant that makes Israel his people. It is carried by priests (3:3); the people must not come closer to it than a kilometre (3:4), and they must 'sanctify yourselves' (3:5). These are powerful symbolic statements of the holiness of YHWH, who is with them, but who remains transcendent. The command 'sanctify yourselves' echoes the command at Sinai:

YHWH said to Moses: 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and prepare for the third day, because on the third day YHWH will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.'

– Exodus 19:10-11

Is this why they are described as camping for three days before crossing over? (3:2).

Verses seven to eight remind us that Joshua's authority comes from YHWH and that Israel must respect him as Moses' successor. They can do so confidently because 'I will be with you as I was with Moses' (3:7; see 1:5). This they will 'know': their experience will prove it. But more importantly, the opening words: 'YHWH said to Joshua' (3:7) remind us that it is YHWH's will that Joshua is carrying out, and that it is to YHWH that Joshua is listening.

It is in the liturgical action carried out in the Gilgal sanctuary that they will 'know' (yādâ) that YHWH (identified in verse ten with the high god, 'El) is among them. For the different groups in Canaan (3:10), see the commentary on Deuteronomy 7:1 (page 89).

The text is abruptly cut off after verse twelve. We have to wait for 4:2 to discover why the twelve men have been selected. There is, of course, no physical comparison between the Jordan (about 90 feet wide and between 3 and 10 feet deep) and the Red Sea, but it is clear that a comparison at the level of symbol is being made. Just as, at the beginning of their journey, the people of Israel were able to cross the Red Sea because 'the waters formed a wall for them on their right and on their left' (Exodus 14:22), so here the waters of the Jordan will 'stand in a heap' (nēd, 3:13 - the word is taken from the Song of Moses, Exodus 15:8).

The first part of verse fifteen is an awkward and unnecessary gloss that has found its way into the text. Adam is just south of where the Jabbok enters the Jordan, about 27 km north of Jericho

⁷YHWH said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. ⁸You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'"

⁹Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of YHWH your God." ¹⁰Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Gergashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: ¹¹the ark of the covenant of YHWH of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. ¹²So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of YHWH, YHWH of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."

¹⁴When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵(Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest.) So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

¹⁷While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of YHWH stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

^{4:1}When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, YHWH said to Joshua: ²"Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, ³and command them, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.'"

⁴Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he had appointed, one from each tribe. ⁵Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of YHWH your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' ⁷then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of YHWH. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever."

⁸The Israelites did as Joshua commanded. They took up twelve stones out of the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as YHWH told Joshua, carried them over with them to the place where they camped, and laid them down there.

This seems to be inserted here from a separate version of the story. The focus here is not so much on the miracle as on the 12 stones that are features of the Gilgal sanctuary ('the place where you camp tonight', 4:3), and are a memorial of the crossing.

The final editors seem to have added 3:12 to make a sort of link between the two versions.

The liturgical nature of the text is highlighted in verse six. We are reminded of the instruction that is part of the liturgy of the pasch:

When your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' you shall say, 'It is the pasch sacrifice to YHWH, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.'

— Exodus 12:26-27

Similarly with the consecration of the first-born:

When in the future your child asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall answer, 'By strength of arm YHWH brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, YHWH killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to YHWH every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

— Exodus 13:14-15

Both the above texts show the presence of the hand of a Deuteronomist (see Deuteronomy 6:2, 7; also 6:20-25 for a similar statement in regard to the 'statutes and edicts').

The word 'memorial' in verse seven is another liturgical indicator.

Verse nine, like the first part of verse fifteen in the previous chapter, seems to be an editorial explanation. One surmise is that after the sanctuary at Gilgal had been destroyed, the people kept the story of the crossing alive by pointing to ‘twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan’ (4:9).

Verse ten follows on from chapter three verse sixteen.

The reference to the Transjordan tribes ‘in battle array’ (4:12) links back with 1:12-18 (see the commentary there).

‘Contingents’ in verse thirteen translates ‘elep, a word that regularly means ‘thousand’, but in an older usage it stood for the quota of armed men that an extended family unit was expected to supply for an army muster. It is suggested that the number varied somewhere between five and fourteen men.

At the beginning of this scene, YHWH promised Joshua:

This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses.

– Joshua 3:7

Verse fourteen assures us that this has happened, and the following verses conclude the crossing of the Jordan. For the fifteenth time in chapters three to four, the ark is mentioned. It is the only time in Joshua that it is called the ark of the ‘testimony’ (‘ēdût). Unlike the Priestly School, the Deuteronomistic School is not interested in the ark as YHWH’s throne, but only as the place in which is kept the decalogue – the witness to the covenant.

The waters of the Jordan flow again. The gate to the realm is closed. YHWH and his people are in the Promised Land.

⁹(Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.)

¹⁰The priests who bore the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan, until everything was finished that YHWH commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people crossed over in haste. ¹¹As soon as all the people had finished crossing over, the ark of YHWH, and the priests, crossed over in front of the people.

¹²The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over *in battle array* before the Israelites, as Moses had ordered them.

¹³About forty *contingents* armed for war crossed over before YHWH to the plains of Jericho for battle.

¹⁴On that day YHWH exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life.

¹⁵YHWH said to Joshua, ¹⁶“Command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, to come up out of the Jordan.” ¹⁷Joshua therefore commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.” ¹⁸When the priests bearing the ark of the *testimony* of YHWH came up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet touched dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before.

¹⁹The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.

²⁰Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, ²¹saying to the Israelites, "When your children ask their parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' ²²then you shall let your children know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.' ²³For YHWH your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as YHWH your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, ²⁴so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of YHWH is mighty, and so that you may fear YHWH your God forever."

^{5:1}When all the kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites by the sea, heard that YHWH had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them, because of the Israelites.

The day and the month are preparing us for the celebration of the pasch (5:10).

'Gilgal'(4:19) is mentioned by name for the first time, though, as we noted earlier, the whole of chapters three and four are best seen as a cultic text for a commemorative liturgy carried out in the sanctuary of Gilgal. The twelve stones in the sanctuary (4:20, see 4:3, 8) are a visual tool for educating the young by handing on the story of the crossing of the Jordan (see the commentary on 4:6). We are meant to recall the altar built by Moses for the ratification of the Sinai covenant:

Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel.

– Exodus 24:4

Note the reference to the Red Sea'(4:24).

The primary connotation of the expression 'fear YHWH'(4:24) is a call for single minded and exclusive loyalty (see Deuteronomy 4:10, page 56, and 5:29, page 80).

The reaction of the 'kings of the Amorites' echoes the reaction of the king of Jericho in the Rahab story (2:3) and her declaration:

As soon as we heard it [what happened at the Red Sea and in Transjordan], our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you.

– Joshua 2:11

We recall the Song of Moses:

In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. The peoples heard, they trembled ... all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, YHWH, passed by ... You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, YHWH, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, YHWH, that your hands have established.

– Exodus 15:13-17

On the subject of circumcision see the commentary on Deuteronomy 10:16 (page 104). The instructions given in Exodus 12:44-48 require that only a circumcised person can share in the pasch. The text speaks here of 'a second time' (5:2). The *first* time is envisaged as being before the first celebration of the pasch on the eve of their leaving Egypt (Exodus 12:21). The final editors go to some trouble to explain all this (5:4-7).

'Gibeath-haaraloth' (5:3) means 'Foreskin hill' – another feature of the Gilgal landscape to help in re-telling the story.

There is a play on words in verses eight to nine. *gāl* means a heap of stones. *gālal* means to roll away. *gilgal* means a circle, a going round and round. The circumcising of the adult males formally constitutes them as members of Israel. They have broken from their slavery to Egypt ('the disgrace of Egypt') and are free men under their new lord, YHWH. All of this is celebrated in the sanctuary of 'Gilgal'.

This is the first pasch celebrated in the Holy Land (5:10-12). On the Pasch and Unleavened Bread see the commentary on Deuteronomy 16:1-8 (page 131).

The manna from heaven stops. They are now eating 'the produce of the land' (5:12), the 'land flowing with milk and honey' (5:6).

They are all formally 'sanctified' and so all is ready for the conquest that will make Canaan a holy land living in a covenant relation with YHWH, their lord.

²At that time YHWH said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time." ³So Joshua made flint knives, and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth.

⁴This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the warriors, had died during the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. ⁵Although all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people born on the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. ⁶For the Israelites traveled forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished, not having listened to the voice of YHWH. To them YHWH swore that he would not let them see the land that he had sworn to their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷So 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.

⁸When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. ⁹YHWH said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the *pasch* in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the *pasch*, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.