

Paradigm for Baptizing Nations?

Joshua 5:2-9

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, October 16th 2022

I. Introduction - Dealing with four bad presuppositions people bring to this passage before reading it.

I really puzzled over how to preach on this rather grisly passage where close to 1.4 million foreskins were heaped up in a rather large pile. Not a pretty sight. But God seems to delight in highlighting this, devoting eight verses to the subject, so there must be a reason why. He doesn't waste space in the Bible. He wants us to understand it. In verse 3 He even *names* the place Gibeath Haaraloth, which means "hill of foreskins." By naming it, He ensures that Israel will never forget this event. It's a very important event.

But to us individualistic westerners, there is so much about this event that seems odd that I decided that I needed to start this sermon by disposing of four wrong presuppositions that some have brought to the passage. One or more of those bad presuppositions have made them either misinterpret it or be puzzled by it. I will then give a very important presupposition that will make this whole passage come to life. Then with that background firmly in our minds, I will try to exegete and apply it. This is going to be more of a didactic sermon. But put your thinking caps on because I think that this passage is very important and very practical for modern missions.

A. Bad presupposition 1 - that mass expressions of faith can't be genuine

The first bad presupposition that some people have is that mass expressions of faith can't be genuine. These people know that Romans 4:11 clearly identifies the circumcision of adults as a sign and seal of justification by faith. It could only be applied to believers and their seed. So they ask, "Why on earth was it applied to everyone here? Did Joshua make a mistake? Surely you can't assume that everyone that crossed the river was a believer, can you?"

These same people are skeptical of the mass baptisms that have taken place in ancient history (like the mass conversion of Armenia as one old example and the mass conversion of Russia¹ as one example at the end of the first millennium, and the remarkable Christianization of the Viking tribes 400 years later). And of course, I am skipping over a

¹ For an interesting link describing the conversion of Russia under Prince Vladimir.
<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/of-mass-baptisms-and-national-churches>

bunch of other mass conversions and baptisms. These are well-documented in history, and they resulted in an enduring and vibrant Christianity. We have lost something.

But the people who hold to this presupposition are probably not that familiar with church history. They tend to be even more skeptical of the mass conversions and baptisms that have been more recently happening among the Dalits of India. They claim that this must be merely a sociological or political movement. They think that there is no way that that many people could come to Christ at once. But as clans and tribes have been coming to Christ en masse in the last few years it is becoming harder and harder to discount. I'll just name a few of these remarkable conversions and mass baptisms. There are several tribes in Brazil, Irian Jaya, the Batak people of North Sumatra, the entire island of Nias where 102,000 people became Christian in a remarkably short period of time. How many here have read the book, *Peace Child*, or have seen the movie? Well, that documents tribes becoming Christian at virtually the same time in Irian Jaya. The only instance in the entire world of 100,000 Muslims being won to Christ almost overnight occurred in a part of Indonesia. Likewise, Ko Tha Byu, a remarkable Burmese evangelist, was instrumental in discipling whole Karen communities and villages to Christ. And then there are the Minahasa of the Celebes. Entire tribal movements have occurred in the Moluccas, Sangi and Talaud islands. And other islands of the Pacific have been largely and unexpectedly disciplined very suddenly as People Movements: that includes the Malas, Madigas, Nagas, Garas, Mahars, Bhils and others. Donald McGavran reports that there are literally hundreds of People Movements around the world today (p. 288). And this gives heartburn to Baptist missionaries. They think, "That's just can't be." And I would ask, "Why can't it be? Can God not sovereignly regenerate that many people at the same time? He can. It takes no more of a miracle to convert 1 million people than to convert one person."

We really shouldn't be surprised. Acts 3:25 quotes the repeated promise to Abraham as a promise that we *must* claim when it says, "In your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." That's a corporate coming to Christ of at least nuclear families, but far more likely a coming to Christ of entire clans. It's one of the ways God works. Psalm 22:27 says, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You." The family is the smallest corporate unit, and reaching families rather than individuals has been the most effective means of reaching tribes.

But Galatians 3:8 quotes the promise that is repeated three times in Genesis, "In you all nations shall be blessed." Nations are the largest corporate units which are prophesied to come to Christ, and according to several prophecies this will become increasingly common until the Great Commission is fulfilled and all nations become Christian nations. Isn't that what the Great Commission calls us to? Yes. We are to win nations. Even in the Old Testament there were examples, like the multitudes of Persians who became Jews in Esther 8:17 - which would have resulted in a mass circumcision. Or you can think of the entire city of Niniveh being converted on one day, which Jesus said was a genuine conversion. Or you can think of the Gibeonite tribe in Joshua 9. We need to dispose of this bad individualistic presupposition that there can't be genuine large-scale conversions of tribes and nations. There most certainly can, and history documents hundreds of examples. That is a thoroughly Arminian presupposition.

B. Bad presupposition 2 - that circumcision identified people as citizens of Israel, not as members of the church

A second bad presupposition that has made people completely misinterpret the nature of circumcision is the belief that circumcision was simply a sign of national citizenship in Israel and not a sign of membership in the synagogues of Israel (which were the churches of Israel). That's a very typical Baptist interpretation. But there are several problems with that theory:

The first problem is that this chapter shows the exact opposite. It shows that a minimum of 1.4 million uncircumcised males had been excluded from the Passover for many decades, but had not been excluded from the nation. It shows that they had been barred from the sign of admission to the church, but they are still treated as Israelites with all the privileges of Israelite citizenship. You didn't have to be circumcised to be an Israelite citizen, but you sure did have to be circumcised to partake of Passover or any other church benefits. There was a clear church/state distinction throughout Israel's history, as Greg Bahnsen and many others have pointed out.

The second problem with this theory is that they were an Israelite nation long before they were circumcised under Moses 40 years before. That may seem like a strange statement since circumcision started with Abraham, but let me explain. During the years of bondage in Egypt God still spoke of them as being Israel, and there were still civil elders of Israel and citizens of Israel. Yet most of them had not been circumcised during that time of bondage in Egypt - which, depending on your theory, was a period of time somewhere between 200 years and 430 years. It was not until they were circumcised and partook of Passover in Exodus 12 that God speaks of them as a congregation. There is a difference between the the nation and the congregation. When a person became ceremonially unclean he was cut off from the congregation, but he was still a citizen of Israel. And when he was cleansed with baptism he was readmitted to the congregation. So this presupposition simply does not hold water.

Third, when you study it out, their objection doesn't even fit the earlier evidence under Abraham. *Long before there was a nation* circumcision was given as a religious covenantal sign to Abraham. With Abraham it wasn't a sign of citizenship. It was a sign of church membership.

Fourth, they were certainly one nation under God during the 40 years of wandering that had occurred just prior to Joshua. Circumcision had nothing to do with their being a nation. We have already read in Exodus 12 that foreigners could get circumcised, enter the church and partake of Passover even if they weren't part of the nation. Israelites could be citizens of other nations and still be members of the church. Circumcision was purely a sign of membership in the spiritual Israel, the church. And so there is no way that Baptists can get around the evidence for infant baptism through this presupposition. If (as many of them admit) baptism replaces circumcision, then without a divine warrant, we may not exclude the children of believers from the church.

C. Bad presupposition 3 - that there were only two circumcised adults here (Caleb and Joshua)

The third bad presupposition is the belief that no one but Caleb and Joshua had previously been circumcised. But that is not true either. Caleb and Joshua's male children were circumcised. Exodus 32 indicates that a large number of Levites (if not all of the Levites) had stood very faithfully with God and Moses and as a result were not excommunicated. Numbers 25 indicates that Phineas was not excommunicated (Numb. 25:10-16). And there are other hints that there was an ongoing remnant of believers who had circumcised their children and had taken communion throughout that 40 year period. But the nation as a whole had not.

D. Bad presupposition 4 - that Israel had been having communion all through the past 40 years (as opposed to just the past 38)

You can find the fourth bad presupposition in many paedocommunion books. It's not essential to paedocommunion, but it is a part of one argument in many of their books. These books presuppose that Israel had been having communion all through the past 40 years. But Exodus 12:48 and other passages absolutely prohibit any uncircumcised person from partaking of Passover or any other form of communion. Which means that for the previous 38 years, the manna that *most* in Israel ate was just food - it was not communion. Only the faithful core used manna for bread in their communion meals under the authority of the Levites. The rest were barred. Deuteronomy, Hebrews 3-4, and 1 Corinthians 10 all make it crystal clear that the bulk of the nation did *not* partake of communion for 38 of those forty years, and that they *could not* partake of communion during those 38 years because God had excommunicated most of them from the Lord's Table at Kadesh Barnea 38 years earlier. Being excommunicated, they weren't allowed to apply the sacrament of circumcision to their children either. It was only during the first two years after leaving Egypt that they partook, and all of the textual data indicates that most of them partook unworthily during those two years and found judgment after judgment as the Pentateuch and 1 Corinthians 10 narrate. As time went on there were more and more individuals who had been excommunicated from the synagogues² and therefore from the sacraments. But two years into the wilderness wanderings, God eventually excommunicated the entire nation as a covenantal unit, and only the individuals and families who remained faithful to the Lord were admitted or readmitted. And by the way, this has also happened in the last 2000 years where nations were excommunicated. Anyway, Deuteronomy 2:14-17 says this:

And the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the Valley of the Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the LORD had sworn to them. 15 For indeed the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from the midst of the camp until they were consumed. 16 So it was, when all the

² See my paper on the synagogue system being established in Exodus 18.

men of war had finally perished from among the people, 17 that the LORD spoke to me...

And then God called his people to once again demonstrate their faith as a nation. The circumcision of a nation was much more involved than the circumcision of an individual who professed faith, just as the baptism of nations is more involved than the baptism of individuals. So the nation as a whole was not circumcised, but many families were.

E. Good presupposition - we must read this passage in light of Deuteronomy 27-34 and Joshua 1-4.

So this brings us to a necessary good presupposition. Almost every confusion on this passage evaporates when one interprets it in light of the events of the last thirty days before chapter 5:2. Approximately a month earlier, every person in that nation had to read out loud and affirm the curses and blessings of Deuteronomy 27-28, got detailed instructions on the covenant in chapters 29-30, made covenant affirmations in chapter 30, received more instruction in chapter 31, memorized a song in chapter 32, and received the blessings of chapter 33. In chapter 34 they mourned Moses' death for thirty days and a transition was made to Joshua's leadership. Then in the first chapters of Joshua there were tests of the genuineness of their faith before they could get circumcised in this chapter.

The point is that there was much more needed in order to prove the *nation's* readiness for mass circumcision and coming into covenant than there would be for an individual. And for the most part the church has followed those precautions before entire nations (starting with the country of Armenia) were allowed by the church to become baptized nations. Because I am not preaching on the last chapters of Deuteronomy, I can't get into all of that, but all of Deuteronomy 27-34 happened immediately before Joshua had them cross the river to get circumcised. And this last covenantal commitment (circumcision) had to happen before the nation as a whole could partake of Passover in Joshua 5:10-12. There is a beautiful logic to all of these chapters. And we have been seeing that God had raised up an entire generation of believers who had a vibrant faith in God. It wasn't necessarily absolutely everyone who would prove to have genuine faith, but all professed it, and the vast majority of this next generation truly possessed it. And the remainder of this chapter will tell us about things that need to be in place if God's people are going to turn the world upside down. So let's start our exposition of these verses.

II. The significance of this circumcision (v. 2)

Verse 1 gets the reader's juices flowing. We looked at this last week. Finally the conquest of the land of Canaan is in sight. The Canaanites are terrified.

And so in verse 2, God's very next words are, "Make flint knives for yourselves..." OK, we can understand knives in the hands of soldiers. They could perhaps be backup weapons for the swords. But no, God isn't going to use these knives on the Canaanites. He is going to use them on the Israelites. Yikes!

Nor were these ordinary knives. Most knives of that time period were made with bronze. God commands Joshua to use flint to make these knives. The only two places in the Bible where flint knives are mentioned are here and where Moses' son Gershom was circumcised. They are ceremonial knives for a ceremonial and covenantal ritual.

Just imagine approximately 65,000 Levites (who were the faithful pastors) giving surgery to 1.4 million men, male children, and male babies. What on earth is going on?

A. God's command required it ("The LORD said... circumcise")

First, I want to emphasize that this was being done at God's command. This was not some strange idea of Joshua. Verse 2 says, "The LORD said... circumcise..." It's a command. God required this mass circumcision, and He recorded it in Scripture for all generations (including ours) to profit from it. The older literature applies this passage to the New Covenant baptism of nations, but you don't see very many modern missionaries catching the significance. Donald McGavran and a few others have been forced to deal with People Movements and the ideas are beginning to take off again, but the modern church has been slow to recognize that this has been God's normal way of proceeding.

B. God's covenant required it ("LORD [Yehowah]... flint knives...children of Israel" cf., Gen. 17; Acts 7:8)

The second thing that I want you to notice is that God's covenant required it. This is implied by three hints - the covenant name Yehowah points them back to the covenant with Moses. The phrase, "children of Israel" points them back to the covenant with Jacob, since Israel was Jacob's covenant name.

The third hint is the word "circumcision" itself. Genesis 17 had established the covenant by making the ceremony of circumcision an imperative for people who want to enter into covenant with God. Genesis 17 indicates that the ideal age for circumcision was eight days old. It says, "For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised." It's implying that there will *ordinarily* be a passing on of the faith from generation to generation. Obviously this chapter has already illustrated that this principle *can* be interrupted, *has* been interrupted, and *continues* to be interrupted from time to time. But right from the beginning covenant succession was implied as the norm. Interruptions to covenant succession are not the norm. They are abnormal.

Why eight days old or older? Science tells us why. The human body has two blood clotting elements: Vitamin K and Prothrombin. Vitamin K is not formed in the body until somewhere between day 2 and day 7. Prothrombin is only at 30% on day 3, but is at 110% of normal on day eight, after which it levels out to 100% of normal. So God designed our bodies to handle circumcision best at day eight after birth or later. The designer of Vitamin K and Prothrombin knew best when he gave the norm for circumcision at day eight.

C. This was the “second time” the entire nation had been circumcised (v. 2d)

The next phrase has the words “the second time” in it. It says, “circumcise the sons of Israel again for the second time.” This doesn’t mean that each person is getting recircumcised a second time - something not possible. It means that this is the second time the *nation as a whole* would be circumcised. The first time they were circumcised as a nation was when they left Egypt. That mass circumcision shows that not all People Movements are genuine. 1 Corinthians 10 indicates that there were a lot of professing believers who were fake believers. And that does occasionally happen even today.

Well, in this text it is now forty years later, so why weren’t all the men forty-and-under circumcised? The short answer is that God had excommunicated most of the older generation. They were part of the nation, but not part of the synagogue system and therefore not heir to the promises being signed and sealed by circumcision. It wasn’t Israel as a *nation* that was heir to those promises. It was Israel as a *congregation* that was. Paul said that all of the promises are yes and amen in Christ and can only be received by faith.

The long answer is given by Moses at the end of the forty year period. He gives that history in Deuteronomy 1-2 and shows that because the twenty year olds and above had repeatedly rebelled against God and shown their unbelief, God swore in His wrath that they would not enter into Canaan. He calls them an evil and unbelieving generation. You can’t be genuine Christians if you are an evil and an unbelieving generation. Hebrews 3:19 says simply, “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” As the Expositor’s Bible Commentary words it, “the sign of the covenant had been suspended while a whole generation rejected the covenant in disobedience and unbelief.”³ Where there is no faith on the part of the parents, they are excluded from the sacraments - as are their children. So for the remainder of those 38 years the vast majority of the nation had not had communion and none of the unbelieving parents were *allowed* to circumcise their children. It wasn’t simply an issue of neglect. They were not *allowed* by God’s law to circumcise their children because they were not part of the church. This is why we don’t allow unbelievers to baptize their babies today. The two sacraments are parallel.

Now, I mentioned earlier that the Levites for the most part remained faithful and there were some other faithful families who had access to the sacraments, but most of the synagogue system of Exodus 18 had pretty much closed down because of lack of believing families. It was a time of decline for the church. Since only believers could circumcise their children, none of the children born during the wilderness wanderings to unbelievers had been circumcised. So this was the second mass circumcision. I know it all seems very strange, but let me give you three practical applications of just this point:

³ Donald H. Madvig, “Joshua,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 274.

First, no one but God can know with absolute certainty whether a profession of faith is genuine or not. We are not asked to know it with certainty. We don't need to know. Deuteronomy gives some tests before adults are circumcised, but even though some of those same tests appeared to have been passed by the Israelites in Egypt before the first Passover, we later discover that they didn't have genuine faith.

But the second application flows from the first. Just because we don't know for sure whether a *profession* of faith is genuine or not is irrelevant to whether we should accept it. We must take professions of faith at their word unless their behavior dictates otherwise. God Himself didn't wait for years after a profession of faith before He applied circumcision in Exodus and He didn't wait for years after any of the professions of faith in the New Testament before he baptized individuals in the New Testament. There are perfectionists out there who are so afraid of getting tares in the church that they wait for years after a profession of faith before they are willing to baptize people. That is not biblical. And by the way, even those perfectionists still find the occasional tare in *their* churches. It's better to use God's means of purification, which is church discipline, rather than to unnecessarily exclude people.

Which is the third application. Jesus said that we shouldn't be surprised that there will be tares in the church. He said that uprooting tares prematurely can do great damage to the good wheat.

So, despite the first bad start forty years earlier, God repeats His command for yet another mass circumcision. We cannot question God's wisdom. And most of the hundreds of modern People Movements have proven to be rather sincere and powerful conversions. There are some that have not, but most have stayed true to the Lord.

D. The circumcision was a sacrament done under authority (v. 3)

Verse 3 shows that the circumcision was done under authority, and not done by individuals within their own families. This is an important point. We don't recognize baptisms performed by unordained parents. They have to be publicly performed by pastors. God's pattern in the New Testament is clear. But it was a pattern already set with the Old Testament sign of entrance into the covenant. And if a circumcision was performed outside the synagogue system in the Old Testament, they required a baptism by the Levites before the circumcision would be recognized. Likewise, if a Jew apostatized and then later repented and came back to the faith, he would have to be baptized, and the baptism was counted as a circumcision. I won't get into that today, but let's go through the phrases of verse 3:

1. Joshua made flint knives (v. 3a)

It says, "So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins." How did he make those flint knives? Did he himself *personally* make thousands of knives? I guess it is possible that he could have, but it is unlikely. Did he all by himself circumcise 1.4 million males in one day? There is no way that he could have even if he was superman. So why does it say that *he* made the knives and *he* circumcised the

people? Because he was the one in authority. If he delegated the task, it was still Joshua who was responsible to make sure it was done.

And by the way, all of this is typological of Jesus baptizing the nations. Joshua was set up as a symbolic type of Jesus. Jesus doesn't baptize the nations personally, but He ensures it is done through His delegated representatives. The name Joshua is "Jesus" in Greek, and the book of Hebrews applies the entire book of Joshua to Jesus bringing the Gospel conquest to the nations - and you can see that especially beautifully in Hebrews 3-4. Indeed, Jesus is said to circumcise us without hands in baptism (Colossians 2:11-12). Baptism replaces circumcision. Or perhaps a better way of saying it is that the bloody rite of circumcision passed away as an ordinance and the baptism that always accompanied circumcision continued and took its place. In any case, Joshua is the authority who represents Jesus typologically.

2. The "they" of verse 8 = Levites

But that it wasn't *just* Joshua who did the circumcising can be seen in verse 8, which says, "So it was, when *they* had finished circumcising all the people..." Notice the "they." There was more than one person who did the circumcising. Who are the "they." I believe it was the faithful Levites who were already circumcised and who had remained faithful to the Lord and who had themselves continued both sacraments for the faithful remnant. So Joshua had a lot of help with the religious leaders who served under him.

3. all in one public spot (v. 3c)

But all of this was done at one place, a hill named after this act of covenanting. Verse 3 goes on to say, "So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins." There is debate on whether the hill was the huge mound of foreskins itself or whether this public space was a natural hill. Most take it as the latter. Either way, it is crystal clear that it was all done at one place. It wasn't done in hundreds of thousands of places.

Why do I emphasize *one* place? Because this was a public sign, not something done in the privacy of the home. I know it would be embarrassing, but it was being performed publically before God and before the Levites. This too speaks against private baptism and shows that the sacraments were done under authority.

E. It symbolized separation from the world (and all its influences) (v. 9; cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6)

What did it symbolize? Verse 9 tells us. It says,

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.

Gilgal means "roll away." Even though they had been a nation called "Israel," their unbelief and rebellion showed that they were more like Egypt than like the spiritual Israel that God

had intended them to be. And Revelation 11 calls the apostate Israel of that day “Sodom and Egypt.”

Though there are liberals who deny this, Jeremiah 9:25-26 makes it crystal clear that the Egyptians were uncircumcised in flesh.⁴ So circumcision is a symbol of no longer identifying with Egypt or the world; putting off everything of Egypt that had clung to them and by faith following God. It’s just like the sign of baptism that symbolizes the washing away of our old identity and giving us a new identity.

And all of this pointed to the need to have inward regeneration if we are to be pleasing to God. The Old Testament speaks of that as the circumcision of the heart, and it is equivalent to the baptism of the Spirit in the New Testament, sometimes called the washing of regeneration. Though Deuteronomy 10:16 says that all are accountable to have our hearts circumcised, and though Jeremiah 4:4 ascribes God’s judgments to the foreskins of our hearts which keep us clothed in worldly thinking, many Scriptures show that this inward circumcision is an impossible operation apart from a work of God’s grace. So Deuteronomy 30:6 gives the remedy. It says, “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

III. The reason for their uncircumcised state explained (vv. 4-6)

The reason for their uncircumcised state is explained in verses 4-6, and it is consistent with what I explained in the introduction, so I won’t have to spend a lot of time on it.

A. Only the children of believers could be circumcised (vv. 4-6 with Heb. 4:1-16)

Starting at verse 4.

4 And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. 5 For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. 6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD—to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, “a land flowing with milk and honey.”

⁴ Jer. 9:25 “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised— 26 Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.”

Verse 4 explains that there had been a mass circumcision when they came out of Egypt. Verse 5 explains that none of their children born after Kadesh Barnea had been circumcised. Verses 5-6 explain why - they were under God's judgment for their rebellion and unbelief. They didn't believe God's promises, even though God had given the promises with an oath.

By the way, for every soldier to have died means that many of these people never reached an age much above 60. That was an unheard of early average age of death for those days. God's covenant promises of long life were annulled. His protections and blessings were cut short. And longer life is one of the blessings that flows out of corporate faith where the curses of God are removed. That's just a sidenote that I think ties in with Ray's book so well.

B. Evidences that these men had faith

But let's look at exegetical reasons why we can conclude that these men had faith. I see four evidences.

1. God raised them up in their place (v. 7a)

First, verse 7 says, "Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He [capital H - that is, God - "whom He"] raised up in their place..." This was a God-thing, not simply a Joshua thing. God was at work in their hearts.

2. Though this would have incapacitated them from war (cf. Gen. 34), they submitted to circumcision in faith (vv. 7b-8)

Second, even though this would have incapacitated them from war, they submitted to circumcision in faith. Verses 7-8 show this incapacitation:

7 Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. 8 So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed.

We looked at this call to faith extensively last week under verse 1. In Genesis 34 there was a mass circumcision of the city of Shechem. While the men were healing, they were so sore and unable to move that two men (Simeon and Levi) were able to kill an entire city of males. That shows they were majorly incapacitated. Yet despite the cost of the pain and despite the risk that this would make them vulnerable to Canaanite attack, they trusted God implicitly and got circumcised on the dangerous side of the river - the Canaanite side. That took faith.

And you know what? In most of the countries of Africa and Asia, when a person gets baptized, the pagans see that as a dividing line, and that's when persecution starts. Getting a public baptism takes faith. It shows a definitive break with their pagan roots and it publically declares that separation.

3. God rolled away Egypt and gave them a new identity (v. 9)

Another evidence of faith is in verse 9. God says, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” Repentance and faith are flip sides of the same coin. Well, the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt shows God’s affirmation that their repentance was genuine. With genuine repentance comes genuine faith.

4. They could not partake of Passover until circumcised and professing faith (vv. 10-12)

The fourth evidence of faith is that God admitted them to the Passover in verses 10-12. It’s a sacrament of faith.

IV. The significance of this event to the Great Commission

A. The book of Joshua is a type of the Great Commission (see Hebrews 3-4)

I’ve already dealt with some of the typological significance of this event earlier. But let me make a few more points. Hebrews 3-4 makes the book of Joshua a type of the Great Commission where Jesus uses the invisible double-edged sword of Scripture to advance His kingdom.

But there is a granular application that Hebrews makes as well.

1. First, the crossing of the Red Sea forty years earlier represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
2. Second, the forty years of wandering represents the forty years of patience Jesus had on Israel from AD 30 to AD 70. There were victories made during that period and there was a remnant of Jews who were saved.
3. Third, AD 70 represents God’s disposing of the reproach of Egypt from Israel as the bulk of the generation passes away in unbelief and judgment.
4. Fourth, the reconstitution of a new Israel is made up of 144,000 Jews from all twelve tribes, into which new believers were grafted. And that is represented here by this formation of a new Israel out of people who had previously been identified with Egypt.
5. Fifth, the conquest of Canaan in the next chapters under Joshua represents the new covenant advance of the Gospel. But Hebrews points out that Joshua didn’t finish the job and that there was a lot of work left for Judges, David, and Solomon - the last type of Jesus and His universal kingdom of peace.

And the more you dig into it, the more beautifully calibrated you can see this typology to be.

B. Ten applications to People Movements of today

Well, I want to end by making ten additional applications to People Movements today.

1. First, we shouldn't be surprised by the hundreds of examples of people groups who have come to Christ in recent history or by the nations in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa that embraced Jesus in the past. The focus of the Great Commission is not just on individuals. It's on discipling nations. Our job is not done until there are covenantal units of families, clans, cities, counties, states, and nations that have embraced Christ and put off the world's ways of doing things. We need to press for this.
2. But second, we shouldn't bypass the tough requirements that God laid down for this nation before they received the sign of initiation. These requirements are beautifully laid out in Deuteronomy 27-34 and in the first chapters of this book. And if God has given genuine faith to a people group, they won't balk at counting the cost. Though I don't want you to blame any deficiencies in what I have presented on Ray, since he wrote his book independently, I think he does a good job of showing the costs that must be counted for a county to have Egypt rolled away and God's curse removed from the land. We are seeing beautiful examples of God's blessings in People Movements around the world. I see no reason why counties cannot experience the same thing in our generation.
3. Third, we shouldn't be disheartened by the abandonment of the faith that previous Christian nations have made. God's Word anticipates that such is possible even though it presses for many generations of faithfulness. Even the apostles had a Simon Magus who proved to be a fake believer in Acts 8 after he was baptized. But those rare examples of bad People Movements don't nullify the principle.
4. But fourth, this means that no Christian clan, tribe, or nation can ever be lax in its pursuit of God. Just as individuals must always press deeper into God and persevere or they become prone to backsliding, there can be no neutrality for larger corporate groups. They must always be on guard against nominalism.
5. Fifth, Deuteronomy and Joshua highlight the critical importance of church discipline in the health of a church. Some think that the only way to maintain purity in the church is by having a believers-only church and excluding their children. But Biblical purity is found in discipleship and discipline, not in excluding our children. I think it is ironic that churches that pride themselves in being "believers-only-churches" are filled with violations of God's law without ever receiving discipline. Discipline is almost non-existent in those churches. I know churches in this city that have musicians who are openly living in adultery without fear of discipline. I don't care how much you talk about profession of faith – something we believe in, but if you don't believe in discipline, you will not have a pure and a healthy church, period. That is God's authorized means. Obviously when discipline is imposed on adults, the children sometimes suffer. That was certainly the case here. Verses 2-9 show that the children of those adults no longer had the privilege of circumcision. In verse 9 God was treating the children as Egyptians even though they were believers. But they were not yet part of the church; they had not yet been circumcised. So the

children of apostates are excluded from the church until they make profession of faith.

6. Sixth, this chapter calls us to antithesis and to counting the cost. Out in Ethiopia where I grew up, people could sometimes skate by when they first made profession of faith in Jesus without getting persecuted. But when they got publically baptized the persecution and ostracism began. It was a dividing point between Egypt and Israel; between the world and the church.
7. Seventh, the shorter lifespan of Israel in the wilderness is just one symptom of God's covenantal curses being experienced in tangible ways. And those were reversed by the covenant. Some of the people groups that have been on fire for the Lord have not only seen their lifespans increase, and disease decrease, but have seen massive blessings in crops, reduction of crime, increase of finances, education, business, weather patterns, relationships, and in other areas of life. I get amazing stories from Reformed missionaries that testify to this happening. Let me read from one Reformed missionary letter that I received this week. He had invited Gary DeMar, Andrew Sandlin, Ron Smith and other Reconstructionists to Mexico to train one of these movements. The missionary, Glenn Dunn, was describing the work in Ixtlahuaca, Mexico. Part way through he said,

After graduating, Tomás return to Ixtlahuaca, and in short order, he built a church with over 1,000 congregants. How did he do it?? The answer seemed so easy and obvious to him. At that time (50 years ago), everyone eked out an impoverished living from their small government-allotted tract of land and their own mule or oxen. Tomás prayed over each believer's plot of land. He asked God to make an obvious distinction between those who belonged to the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God.

I was there. I saw it. I walked the fields. The unbelievers' corn fields were yellowish, about waist high. The believers' corn fields were dark green, and over my head. Field after field, side by side. Same old-fashioned farming methods. One blessed, one not. Church growth was explosive.

Some of you have seen the Transformations series of videos. Though I can't in any way endorse the New Apostolic Reformation since they have major doctrinal flaws and extreme practices, they have been documenting some of these social and physical blessings that flow from having God's curse removed from the land. It's real. But if you want to think locally, I think pastor Raymond Simmons book is a much better introduction to some of the ideas of the blessings that can flow locally when God's curse is removed from the land or from a people.⁵ But I would like to see us praying these blessings over each other in this

⁵ https://smile.amazon.com/Confessional-County-Realizing-Kingdom-Christendom/dp/1513684752/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2M36U9GXF6CWA&keywords=the+confessional+county&qid=1665610713&qu=eyJxc2MiOiIwLjcxliwicXNhIjoiMC4zMjIsInFzciCI6IjAuMzQifQ%3D%3D&prefix=the+confessional+county%2Caps%2C124&sr=8-1

congregation.

8. Eighth, the individual is not lost in the corporate. It's not an either/or issue. Verses 2 and 3 show each male being circumcised. You can't get more individual than that. It wasn't enough for a tribal chief to make profession of faith and to get circumcised on behalf of everyone else. Each family had to make its own painful step of faith. People Movements are not like Islamic countries in North Africa where everyone is forced to embrace Islam, or where a tribal chief makes a decision and everyone has to go along with it. We are talking about God sovereignly moving in bringing genuine conversion to a mass of individuals. 9. Ninth, People Movements find it just as painful to join the covenant as individuals do. The pain of Israel in these verses is obvious, but there are other forms of persecution and pain that People Movements have faced when they embrace Christ. 10. Tenth, verse 7 shows that People Movements are not merely sociological movements. They are a work of God's sovereign grace. It says that *God* raised them up. No one can produce a People Movement. It is a mysterious moving of God's Spirit. Donald McGavran says, "We dare not think of People Movements to Christ as merely social phenomena. True, we can account for some of the contributing factors which have brought them about; but there is so much that is mysterious and beyond anything we can ask or think, so much that is a product of religious faith, and so much evident working of divine Power, that we must confess that People Movements are gifts of God." (p. 289) And I say, Amen.

This has been an odd pericope that we have looked through, but I hope you not only understand it better, but that it will challenge your faith to believe that God does indeed continue to work in families, clans, and nations in remarkable ways. Amen.