

## **HOW SHALL WE STUDY OUR OLD TESTAMENTS? - Part six**

**Sunday, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026 - 5:30 p.m.**

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### **THREE CHANGELESS INGREDIENTS FOR A FRUITFUL LIFE (cont)**

For the last two weeks we've been looking at ***three changeless ingredients for fruitfulness*** from the life of Joshua. He will need all the help he can get. Imagine picking up the mantle of Moses. Imagine leading millions of people who will be ***comparing*** him to Moses and ***relying*** on him to keep them happy and content in their struggles and battles in their new land. No one in his or her right mind would envy Joshua's assignment. The first two ingredients to fruitfulness that we studied were the ***authoritative Word of God*** and the ***continuing power of God***. Today we will study the ***third*** ingredient to fruitfulness, the ***constant presence of God***.

The difference between these last two - ***power*** and ***presence*** - is subtle but important. God's ***power*** is His ***presence*** manifested. It's His presence ***visible***. But His presence is His ***Person***. And He's frequently doing important things just by being ***with*** us that can be easily missed. That's where today's account fits in:

**Joshua 5:1-6:2 - "As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel. [2] At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." [3] So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. [4] And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. [5] Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. [6] For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord; the Lord swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. [7] So 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. [8] When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed."**

**[9] “And the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. [10] While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. [11] And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. [12] And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. [13] When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" [14] And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" [15] And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.....**

**[6:1] “Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. [2] And the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.”**

This passage is so rich with lessons. Both Joshua and the people find themselves at a place they've never encountered before. They are ***entering into*** the promised land. They are entering into the ***promise of God*** for them. Everything else has been ***preparatory*** for this momentous day. They are ***stepping into*** God's will and way for them.

What happens when people choose to follow the Lord? What happens when His call has been heard, perhaps resisted at points (like the wandering generation in the wilderness), but finally courage is summoned and self is dethroned? What lies ***inside*** the will of God for those who honor and walk in His ways?

Joshua is, for the very first time, looking at life from ***inside*** the promised land. He's at that point you and I have been at. He's made the decision. He's made the start. He's in for the duration. And ***now*** it's time to start encountering opposition. The doubters and deniers have all died off in the wilderness. That whole forty year stretch would never be forgotten by Joshua.

Now that he's *in* the promised land he will find challenges a plenty. And there are times when he would, I'm sure, have his doubts and fears. But then he would pause and remember the cost of *not* following the call of God. He would remember, every time he looked over at his friend and fellow spy Caleb, the extreme cost of *turning back* from God's will and way. He had buried a whole generation of doubters and nay sayers in the wilderness.

So now the test comes. This is always the way it is. How does one start to deal with the problems and challenges that are set out against our progress in the Christian walk? This passage offers practical help:

1) **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S HEART WHEN HIS WAYS SEEM STRANGE**

There are several lessons embedded in the first twelve verses of chapter five:

- a) ***The manna from heaven stopped as soon as they were obediently in the promised land - 5:12 - "And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."***

This must have seemed confusing at first. Why would this wonderful provision **stop** the moment they obediently **entered** the full promise of the Lord? God **provided** the manna for the **disobedient** wanderers and **removed** it from the **obedient** generation who **entered** the land. They were **weaned off** certain blessings to which they had grown accustomed.

What might have gone through their minds? "Doesn't God love us any more? Are we living in some unknown sin? Has God abandoned us to suffer and struggle all alone now? It just doesn't feel the same without manna from heaven. I can remember in the good old days when we always had manna in the morning!"

What we don't hear said very often is sometimes blessings are **removed** as we spiritually **mature**. This is very important in understanding the ways of God over a life time. The manna in the wilderness was never given as a **reward** for faithfulness. The people **weren't** faithful at all. They were **needy**. They were wanderers - nomads - with no place to put down roots. But now they were in the promised land. This was to be God's **home** for them. And he wants them to **plant fields** and **grow corn** and **bake bread**.

There will continue to be times of wonderful, miraculous intervention from on high. God will always be faithful and good. But that **doesn't** mean they are to interpret times when God **doesn't** miraculously intervene as being times when He's no longer interested or present. He is still active, working a different **kind** of work among them.

There is such a rich lesson here. I must obey and follow God when He provides that crossing through the Jordan River. I must also follow and obey Him when He doesn't **seem** to be doing anything at all.

- b) ***New beginnings always call for fresh consecration - Joshua 5:2-10.*** The early portion of chapter six just briefly hints that Jericho lies right on the doorway of possessing the land. That means their robes and shoes are barely dry from the muddy Jordan crossing and they have enemies to fight. But there's something else they must take care of **first**. And they learn their greatest enemy isn't **outside** but **inside**. So God's **first** call isn't to military battle. They stopped to **circumcise a new generation** and **celebrate the Passover** as soon as they crossed the Jordan.

What's the first step on the victorious road to defeating Jericho? Surprisingly, it's not making **spear and swords** for battle. It's making **knives** for circumcision. Circumcision - that painful, no fun sign of their belonging to God's covenant people. In other words, before they would realize their **ownership of the land** they would have to re-establish God's **ownership of themselves**.

Do you see the lesson? God's power over their enemies isn't the primary issue. There is no doubt whatsoever about that. There is no doubt whatsoever about whether or not God's plan for them is right and good and doable. There is only one variable in the whole equation. The only thing they need to worry about is God's **ownership of them**. Would they be faithful at all costs? This is the issue pressed home first because this is the **only** issue on which victory depends.

I know we don't think of circumcision much in a religious sense today, but we'll miss some important lessons if we ignore a few relevant Old Testament texts:

**Genesis 17:7-9 - "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." [9] And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations."**

Notice that even though this covenant was established with ***Abraham*** God was looking forward to the entering of the promised land. And the covenant was to be kept ***perpetually***.

**Exodus 12:48-49 - "If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. [49] There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you."**

Don't miss the key principle in these old words. No uncircumcised person was to partake of the Passover. The Passover celebrated God's deliverance from Egypt. It proclaimed God's delivering, keeping, protecting power - His miraculous power manifested on behalf of His people. And those who hadn't paid the price of dedication and obedience were not to be encouraged to think they could casually receive God's gracious presence ***on their own terms.***

So here they are - Joshua and people - in this new land. A new obedient generation has crossed, with miraculous help, the Jordan river. It's a big moment. But wait a minute. There is a whole generation that had grown up in the wilderness wanderings. They were uncircumcised. Their ***fathers*** were, but they ***aren't.*** And they all need to learn the basic truth that while God is ***gracious*** He is not the ***tooth fairy.*** He works in terms of ***covenant.***

So, with all the hustle and bustle of entering the land, with all the challenges and battles, with laying claim to the land that must eventually be divided up among them, God calls this generation to ***covenant with*** the Lord ***for themselves.*** What their ***fathers*** experienced won't carry over for ***them*** into the new land. They must present ***themselves*** to the Lord.

This is highly significant. In our day it is usually **babies** who are circumcised. There is no decision and no memory. But most of Joshua's men were of fighting age. Joshua was told to **"make knives and circumcise the men"** (2). When you're an adult male and somebody else comes to you with a sharpened piece of rock to circumcise you, **you tend to study that situation a little bit**. And you tend to **remember** it.

One thing is for sure about adult circumcision, there is a world of difference between **hearing** about it, **reading** about it, perhaps even **agreeing** with it, and **experiencing** it for yourself. That's the whole point of this chapter. **A whole generation has grown up wandering in the wilderness**. Their fathers were circumcised, but they never were. And God brings them to a specific point. At a point where nothing could touch them more closely God causes His covenant with them - His **relationship** with them - to be something they would be unable to forget.

This is God's way of saying, **"It's time to bring all this wandering to an end. Enter in to covenant with me for yourselves. This is a new land and a new time. You will never conquer this land coasting on the old spiritual relics of another generation! You can't walk with Me on someone else's commitment."**

This presses all of us to ask where our commitment to God ***cuts into*** our lives. At what point does the call of Jesus ***slice off something precious and tender of your own former self?***

2) **THE ISSUE ISN'T WHETHER GOD IS WITH YOU. THE ISSUE IS ARE YOU WITH HIM**

**Joshua 5:13-14** - "When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" [14] And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

Our promotional, media driven version of Christianity makes big business of teaching people how to get every drop of blessing out of God. Tapping into everything good and happy is an obsession for the North American church. But we encounter something fresh, corrective, and beautiful in this account from Joshua 5.

Joshua is out walking alone. He's near the city of Jericho, probably trying to figure out what the best plan of attack would be. As of yet, he's been given no instructions. No direction has come from the Lord. As he walks with his head toward the ground, he encounters somebody standing before him with a drawn sword and, being a military man, Joshua asks the immediately obvious question: **"Are you for us, or against us?"(13).**

Joshua knows it's important to know who your friends are and who your enemies are when you're going into battle. This divine being gives an answer that immediately brings the real issue into clear focus: **"....No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come"(5:14).** We're meant to take note of the way this being begins his response with a sharp **"No"** - **"No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come."**

Joshua's question can't be answered without that **"no"** because he's asking the wrong question altogether. Like us, Joshua wants to know if this being is on **his** side. And this **"commander of the army of the Lord"** doesn't **take** sides. He, as his title suggests, **commands**. People line up with **him**. He doesn't line up with anybody.

God has made great promises to Joshua. And He's made great promises to you and me. God has great **capacity for deliverance and provision**. But now the real issue boils to the surface. Does Joshua just want God's **help**, or is he committed to be His **servant**?

Joshua's response is magnificent: **"...And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, 'What does my lord say to his servant?'"** Underline that word **"servant"**. There's the key to life under God's leading. Joshua has plenty on his mind. He desperately needs the Lord's help at this very moment. But he's wise enough to know he won't be at his best if he just tries to get God to put His muscle behind Joshua's plans.

As Joshua spies out the city and makes his plans, the real course of events is going to unfold very differently indeed. The success of the next day is going to depend on Joshua grasping this lesson today because Joshua won't believe how God is going to bring the city of Jericho under Israel's power.

To underscore Joshua's submission to God in everything he will hear and obey, God repeats some very famous words to the new leader after Moses - **Joshua 5:15** - **"And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, 'Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did so."**

Joshua has never been called to do or go through anything like what he's about to face. This is all new territory. And Moses isn't there to help him anymore. The lesson is actually simple. When the heat is on, don't stand on anything **man-made**. Because we are so prone to forget that the arm of flesh will fail, God literally makes these two great leaders **take their shoes off**. They must **learn** to call on the name of the Lord because we don't rely on Him naturally.

Tomorrow will be a big day for Joshua. It will mark his first battle in the promised land. It will be a turning point in his leadership. All the people and all the surrounding nations will be watching. What do you think Joshua thought about when he went to bed that night? Did God's plan seem highly unlikely to succeed?

I'll tell you what *I* think he thought about. I think he remembered a battle when he was a bit younger. It was against the **Amalekites**. He saw all over again what happened with Moses' hands were up in prayer as opposed to what happened when they were down. I think Joshua remembered to say his prayers that night.

And I think he remembered something else. I think he pondered long about a day thirty-eight years ago, to be exact, when God had a plan for another venture, the immediate taking of the promised land. And only Joshua and his good friend Caleb had the wisdom to agree with God. And then I think Joshua smiled and went to sleep.