

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 5

The New Generation Circumcised

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.

One of the aims of the LORD in performing the Jordan miracle was “so that all the peoples of the earth might know the hand of the LORD—that it is strong” (4:24). That purpose is quickly fulfilled in the case of the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and the Canaanite kings along the Mediterranean Sea. The LORD’s strong hand that dried up waters melts the hearts of these kings who hear the report. Those who are now living in dread are *kings*, not weak peasants without resources. Not only the mighty act of drying up the Jordan melts hearts and knocks the spirit out of these kings, but also the practical benefit of the miracle does the same. Israel has arrived and is camped on west-bank soil within Amorite and Canaanite turf. The whole scene is heart-melting and dispiriting for the kings of the land. They are forced to ask, “If not even the surging river can block the LORD from leading his people to their promised inheritance, what can?” (CC)

The enemies of Jesus in the NT likewise must have been terrified when he rose from the dead. If Satan and all the powers of death and hell could not hold back Christ, what can stop him from reigning over all authorities in heaven and on earth and subjecting all things to himself? The answer, of course, is that nothing can stop him. This answer is of great comfort to believers: nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:31–39). For now earthly and demonic hostile powers still rage, but their defeat has been accomplished on the cross and our victory in Christ is secure (cf. Psalm 110; 1 Cor 15:24–28; Phil 2:6–11; Heb 2:8). (CC)

5:1–12 Two covenantal ceremonies were resumed at Gilgal in accordance with the laws from Sinai: the rite of circumcision and the Feast of the Passover. Both were significant preparations for the conquest of the Promised Land. (CSB)

5:1 *Amorite ... Canaanite.* Usually interchangeable, these general names included the many smaller nations in the land. Amorite meant “westerner,” and Canaanite referred to the people living along the

Mediterranean coast. This verse perhaps concludes the account of the crossing since it notes the effect of that event on the peoples of Canaan (see note on 3:10). (CSB)

Cf 3:10. Each name has a narrow and a broad sense—as individual people and as a name that stands for all the peoples of the land. Here, the two names represent all the peoples west of the Jordan. (TLSB)

melted. Cf 2:9, though a different Hbr word is used there. (TLSB)

It is evident in Josh 5:1 that the LORD himself has already begun fighting against the enemies of his people. His enemies have no “spirit” while his people are filled with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes God makes the hearts of his enemies melt in terror. At other times, the enemies’ fear of Israel and hardened hearts against the LORD lead them to wage war, but eventually they will be destroyed by the LORD and his hosts (9:2; 11:20). (CC)

Here the LORD melts the enemies in order to grant his OT people a time of peace for the important spiritual activities that are the focus of this chapter. The LORD’s complete control over enemies, even in determining how they can react (11:20), is a courage-building reality for his people. Christians, who constitute the new Israel, are reminded here of the great NT promises that Christ rules over everything for the good of his church. This includes his control of the behavior of enemies (Eph 1:22–23; Heb 2:6–9; 10:13). (CC)

no longer any spirit. They lost courage. (TLSB)

5:2 *flint knives*. Metal knives were available, but flint made a more efficient surgical tool, as modern demonstrations have shown. Israel had to be consecrated to the Lord’s service before she could undertake the Lord’s warfare and take possession of the land (cf. Ex 4:24–26). (CSB)

Sharp and plentiful. Stone knives would also remind Israel that circumcision was an ancient sign of God’s covenant with Abraham. (TLSB)

circumcise. Circumcision marked every male as a son of Abraham (Ge 17:10–11) bound to the service of the Lord, and it was a prerequisite for the Passover (Ex 12:48). (CSB)

As early as the twenty-third century B.C., Egyptians practiced a kind of circumcision in which the foreskin was slit but not removed. (CC)

OT circumcision prefigures NT Baptism, as Paul shows in Col 2:11–12. (TLSB)

a second time. Not recircumcising individuals but reestablishing the practice of circumcision. (TLSB)

Covenant renewal is behind all the activity in 5:2–12. In church history, this might be likened to Josiah’s reform (2 Ki 23:1–28) or to the Lutheran Reformation. The two great covenants of the Lord with Israel are in view through circumcision and the Passover, the two main ceremonies associated with those covenants. Circumcision was a sign of God’s covenant with Abraham, and the Passover celebrated the exodus and Mosaic covenant. The covenant nation had lived in a state of suspension during the thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness. They did not circumcise, and they did not celebrate Passover until the unfaithful generation died off and the new generation was to be sanctified to receive the inheritance (cf. Rom 8:29–30). (CC)

It was crucial to renew circumcision at this point in Israel’s national life. (CC)

Circumcision was the pledge, seal, and sign in human flesh of the Lord's covenant with and promises to Abraham. By solemn contact without any conditions, he promised Abraham a great name, a special land, numerous children, and a particular Seed or Offspring, through whom all peoples on earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1–3, 7; Gal 3:16). Now the numerous children of Abraham stand on the promised soil with their enemies melting in fear. The promise of the Offspring who will live, minister, die, and rise again in this very land is coming one major step closer to its fulfillment. It is obvious, even before the statements of Joshua in 23:14, that the Lord is keeping all his promises to Abraham. Israel has every reason to delight in the rite that is the sign of the covenant with Abraham, a covenant of free, unconditional grace. (CC)

It is the LORD himself in 5:2 who gives the command to Joshua to “make for yourself knives of flint, and again circumcise the sons of Israel.” There is no hint of reprimand here for not doing this earlier. The atmosphere surrounding the LORD's words is one of celebration in light of Israel's impending success under the divine Commander whom Joshua will soon encounter (5:13–15). The command is not to recircumcise individuals (which would be impossible) but to start anew with the new generation of Israel, since the practice had been suspended during the years of the wilderness wandering. At Mount Sinai Moses had commanded a spiritual circumcision: “Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and do not be impenitent any longer!” (Deut 10:16). But while Israel was on the march, there had been no physical circumcision. (CC)

The LORD specifies the instrument to be used. The book of Joshua contains some strikingly specific commands that come from the LORD, for example 8:2 and 11:6, underscoring his intimate attention to every aspect of his people. Why the use of the more ancient “knives of flint” (5:2–3) when metal had been in use for centuries? There are at least two possible reasons. First, the old tool (used for circumcision in the days of Moses [Ex 4:25]) is a reminder that circumcision is the ancient and longstanding sign of the LORD's covenant stretching back more than half a millennium to the time of Abraham, when stone tools were more common. Modern demonstrations have even shown flint knives to be better surgical tools than metal ones. (CC)

Similarly, a church may employ an antique baptismal font or communion chalice for the Sacrament instituted two thousand years ago by the LORD as a reminder that the rites transcend our present, fleeting span of time. The church adheres to the ancient ecumenical Creeds and uses the historic liturgy and hymns in the Divine Service—partly because they have passed the test of time (and are unsurpassed) and partly to affirm the church's continuity with the saints who have gone before. Even by these very tools of worship, the LORD leads his people to reflect on the ancient covenant and cling to his old promises amid the present and future realities. (CC)

Circumcision was not unique to Israel. It was a common practice in the Near East many centuries before Abraham's time, as evident from Old Kingdom Egyptian tomb art and hieroglyphs and an ancient stone model found near Nineveh in Mesopotamia. Why did many of the ancients circumcise? Theories include the following:

- As a tribal mark to distinguish one group from another
- As a rite of passage into adulthood, still common today among some African tribes
- As a substitute for human sacrifice
- As a way of promoting personal hygiene (CC)

What was unique to Israel was the theological significance that God attached to circumcision. He made it a sign and seal of his covenant promises to Abraham. More specifically, Paul stated about Abraham:

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith, which he had while still uncircumcised, so that he is the father of all who believe though uncircumcised, so that righteousness is imputed also to them, and the father of those who are circumcised—who are not only circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham, which he had while uncircumcised. (Rom 4:11–12) (CC)

The truth of Paul’s statement is seen by the simple fact that Abraham “believed God and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6) two chapters of Genesis *before* God instituted the sign of circumcision for Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17). Righteousness through faith came first; circumcision as the visible sign followed. (CC)

In the action of Josh 5:2–3, the LORD himself is reaffirming his everlasting, unconditional pledge of grace for the offspring of Abraham, and he is placing on them the seal of the righteousness that he has credited to them through faith. See Lev 26:40–45 for the LORD’s promise never to forget or break this covenant with the patriarchs, even when his people later will be in exile in the land of their enemies. (CC)

In a secondary way, the act of circumcision is Israel’s response in faith, indicating the people’s willingness and desire to receive and live by this righteousness through faith alone according to the Abrahamic covenant, which provided a refuge of grace for all who could not keep the Sinai covenant. Note the repetition produced by the command of 5:2 and the same vocabulary recording the action in 5:3. The repetition emphasizes the obedient action of Joshua, just as we saw repeatedly in chapters 3–4. We do not need to assume that Joshua personally carried out the circumcision of every man. The author credits him with the action because the LORD gave the command to him and because he made sure that the covenant nation followed God’s Word. (CC)

Apart from special occasions such as the circumcision in 5:2–3, God directed that normally an infant boy would be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen 17:12). It is thus evident that those infants were not choosing the LORD, but that he in grace was choosing them to be members of his covenant family. If other ancient cultures circumcised twelve- or thirteen-year-olds primarily as a rite of passage from puberty to adulthood, the LORD’s command to circumcise infant boys on the eighth day comes as a radical departure from the old practice and accents its divine purpose of grace toward Israel. It seems that the practice of infant circumcision as God mandated for Israel was unique in antiquity (*TWOT*, 495). (CC)

True circumcision is the work of God in the heart in which he creates spiritual life. This is clear in Deut 30:6 and Paul’s allusion to that passage in Rom 2:29: “Circumcision is a circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.” The eighth day (counted inclusively) was the first day of a new week—the first day of the second week of the baby’s life. (A boy born on the first day after the Sabbath would be circumcised on the day after the next Sabbath.) God had completed his first creation in one week, consisting of seven days (Gen 1:1–2:4). The first day of the new week therefore was a sign of the new creation—a new act of God in which he redeems his people from the old, fallen creation and makes them heirs of eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. Circumcision on the eighth day thus had a similar significance as the “eight souls” who were saved through water on Noah’s ark as a type of Christian Baptism (1 Pet 3:18–21). While the rest of the human race perished, from those eight souls humanity began anew. (CC)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ took place on “the first day of the week” (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1), the commencement of a new week following the Sabbath that marked the completion of the old creation (Gen 2:2–3; Ex 20:11). Christ is the firstfruits from the dead, the first to be raised bodily in glory, never to die again. Christ’s resurrection thus inaugurated the new and everlasting creation. The NT portrays the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as the fulfillment of the OT rite of circumcision and as the Sacrament that incorporates the baptized (male or female) into the death and resurrection of Christ:

In him [Christ] you were circumcised by a circumcision not done with human hands, by the taking off of the body of sinful flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. You were buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also resurrected with him through faith from the working of God, who raised him from the dead. While you were still dead in transgressions and in the foreskin of your sinful flesh, God made you alive with him [Christ], graciously forgiving to us all transgressions. (Col 2:11–13) (CC)

In Gen 17:14 the LORD states that the soul who rejects the LORD’s covenant of circumcision “will be cut off from its kin; he has broken my covenant.” In the NT era, it is possible for an unbaptized person to be saved (e.g., the penitent thief on the cross, who apparently had no opportunity to be baptized), but the pattern established in the earliest apostolic church is for those who repent to be baptized promptly (Acts 8:12–13, 36, 38; 9:18), and for households to be baptized (Acts 10). Indeed, the Lord Jesus (Mt 28:19–20) and the apostles (e.g., Acts 2:38–39) command Baptism as necessary for those who would be saved. (CC)

5:4 *died in the wilderness*. As God foretold (Nu 14:26–30). (TLSB)

Josh 5:4–7 constitutes a short but powerful Law and Gospel presentation by the author for all who read his inspired book. His narrative style gives way to an unmistakable sermonic tone at this point. In his explanation of why the mass circumcision was necessary, there is implicit warning. At the same time, he highlights the LORD’s overwhelming love and faithfulness. (CC)

5:6 *forty years*. The time between their departure from Egypt and the crossing of the Jordan. Only 38 years had passed since they turned back at Kadesh Barnea (Nu 14:20–22; Dt 2:14). (CSB)

Either no one was circumcised for the entire 40 years between leaving Egypt and entering the Promised Land or, more likely, circumcision ceased at the time of the rebellion of Nu 14, for 38 years (Dt 2:14). (TLSB)

voice of the LORD. His Word. (TLSB)

land flowing with milk and honey. The nouns מֶלֶךְ and שֶׁבֶט are objective genitives: the land gushes out “milk” (HALOT, s.v. מֶלֶךְ) and “honey.” שֶׁבֶט can refer either to “bees’ honey” or to the sweet liquid “from dates and grapes ... boiled down to a syrup” (HALOT). (CC)

In a wide sense, this proverbial expression describes a land that possesses every desirable quality in abundance. In a more narrow sense, it speaks of a land that is fruitful and productive for both animal husbandry and agriculture. (CC)

Because “milk” cannot literally flow from the land itself, the Talmud explains the expression as a metaphor, “a land whose fruits are as fat as milk and as sweet as honey.” “Honey” may refer to the sweet dates and figs of the land. Another interpretation sees “milk” as denoting agricultural products of all kinds and “honey” as referring to nomadic products. The expression would then describe a land where you can gather what appears naturally or where you can settle down and plant and reap and tend animals. To a wandering people, therefore, the phrase would mean not just prosperity, but also stability—a permanent home. (CC)

5:7–8 Special circumstances call for mass circumcision. In the future, all eight-day-old males could be circumcised, as originally commanded (Gn 17:12). Just: “The blood of that circumcision is obsolete, and we trust in the blood of salvation; there is now another covenant, and another law has gone forth from Zion. Jesus Christ circumcises all who will ... that they may be a righteous nation, a people keeping faith, holding to the truth, and maintaining peace” (ANF 1:206). (TLSB)

5:7 *not been circumcised on the way.* The wandering would not necessarily have affected the practice, as the nation camped for long periods. (TLSB)

5:8 *healed.* In Gn 34, the men of Shechem were still in pain and unable to fight three days after circumcision. Israel crossed the river on the 10th of the month (4:19) and celebrated Passover the evening of the 14th (5:10). The circumcision took place between those dates. (TLSB)

By projecting the census figures of Numbers 26, which give a total of 601,730 fighting men, we might estimate that the entire population of Israel was at least two million at this time. About half, or a million of them, would be males. Assuming that circumcision ended thirty-eight years earlier after the rebellion in Numbers 14, all males up to thirty-eight years old now needed to be circumcised. The men between thirty-nine and fifty-eight had already been circumcised in Egypt. All of the men over fifty-eight had died except for Joshua and Caleb, because God had declared that all the men aged twenty years and older would perish in the wilderness before Israel would enter the land (Num 14:29; cf. Num 14:22–24). (CC)

About one-third of the males, then, were already circumcised and could perform or assist with the surgery. About two-thirds, perhaps 700,000, now undergo circumcision at Gilgal. When 5:8 tells of “the whole nation” being circumcised, the author is referring to males from every tribe of Israel and not each male in Israel. The writer thus again alludes to the theme of the unity of the covenant nation. (CC)

With two-thirds of Israel’s males recovering from surgery, we would expect the nation’s camp to be vulnerable to attack. But here the men of Israel can stay in their place in the Gilgal camp and recuperate in safety. The LORD, by the continuing effect of the report of his drying up the Jordan, is still melting the hearts of Canaanite kings into non-action and giving time for healing (Josh 2:9–11; 5:1). The protecting and healing hand of the LORD is present. In Genesis 34 the men of Shechem were still in pain and unable to fight three days after their circumcision. The LORD seems to give quicker healing to the men of Israel here than the Shechemites experienced. His health-care plan for his covenant nation is comprehensive. (CC)

5:9 *reproach of Egypt.* Although the reference may be to Egypt’s enslavement of Israel, it is much more likely that the author had in mind the reproach the Egyptians would have cast upon her and her God if Israel had perished in the desert (see Ex 32:12; Nu 14:13; Dt 9:28). Now that the desert journey is over and Israel is safely in the promised land as his special people consecrated to him by circumcision, the reproach of Egypt is rolled away. (CSB)

Included the lack of circumcision and the disdain Egypt would have shown toward Israel and the Lord, had all Israel died without taking the Promised Land (Ex 32:12; Nu 14:13–16; Dt 9:28). (TLSB)

At Golgotha Jesus would “roll away” the guilt of humanity’s sin, which had been upon all people since the fall of Adam, even as at Gilgal the LORD “rolled away” (Josh 5:9) the reproach that had been upon Israel since the people left Egypt. (CC)

Since the LORD here states that *he* is the one who rolls away the reproach, the LORD identifies himself as the one who did the circumcising, even though the people of Israel performed the physical act. The reality is like that of Christian Baptism, which is essentially *God’s gracious act*, even though a human applies the water and speaks God’s words: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (cf. Mt 28:19). (CC)

Gilgal. The settlement at the hill where the ceremony takes place receives the name “Gilgal.” The designation is fitting because it derives from the verb in the LORD’s explanation, “today *I have rolled away* the reproach of Egypt from upon you.” We heard the name earlier in 4:19, where the author by

prolepsis called the place “Gilgal,” though its actual naming takes place here. The town is commonly identified with Khirbet el-Mafjher, about a mile and a third northeast of Jericho. Josh 15:7 shows that there is another Gilgal at the northern boundary of Judah. There seem to be five different places in the OT that share the name. (CC)

What is “the reproach of Egypt” that the LORD “gilgals” or rolls away at this place of circumcision? The reproach evidently was not Israel’s slavery in Egypt, since that bondage rolled off the back of Israel at the exodus forty years earlier. The reproach had to do with the cessation of the practice of circumcision since the time the people left Egypt (5:4–7). It was a reproach for God’s chosen people to be uncircumcised, because they were in violation of his covenant with them. “An uncircumcised man, whose foreskin of flesh is not circumcised—that soul will be cut off from its kin; he has broken my covenant” (Gen 17:14). (CC)

“The reproach of Egypt” (5:9) could also refer to the sarcasm the Egyptians could have leveled against Israel and the LORD if all Israel had died in the desert after their God brought them out from bondage. We are led to this interpretation in light of Ex 32:12; Num 14:13–16; and Deut 9:28. In these passages Moses expresses what the Egyptians would be able to conclude if Israel would not enter Canaan. In Deut 9:28 Moses says: “Lest the country from which you brought us out will say, ‘Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.’ ” (CC)

With Israel dwelling securely in the promised land at Gilgal, the potential reproach of the Egyptians rolls away even as the hearts of the Canaanites melt away (Ex 15:15; Josh 2:9, 24). The LORD has seen to it that his people enter the land of milk and honey. He himself has renewed his covenant with them as further proof of the gracious love he has shown in the events all along the journey from Egypt to the plains of Jericho. (CC)

The rolling away of the reproach of Egypt at Gilgal anticipates the rolling away of humanity’s guilt at Golgotha (Γολγοθᾶν), which means Κρανίου Τόπος. “Place of the Skull” (Mk 15:22). The names Gilgal and Golgotha have a common derivation through the root גלל. By the crucifixion of Christ at Golgotha, the LORD rolled away—canceled, forgave—all the charges that have accrued against us for our violations of God’s covenant laws. He nailed the accusations to the cross of Golgotha. During this life, suffering and persecuted Christians may endure reproach and derision from unbelievers, but the public vindication of our hope in Christ will come at the resurrection from the dead, even as Christ’s resurrection shamed his enemies and vindicated all his claims. (CC)

Paul may have had in mind the scene of Josh 5:9 as he wrote the words of Col 2:11–15, which portrays Christian Baptism as the new circumcision, not done with human hands, that incorporates us into Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul declares that Christ has taken away the Law’s accusations against us, disarmed the hostile authorities and powers, and publicly triumphed over those enemies. Christ did on the cross what Joshua’s actions at Gilgal could only anticipate. Christ’s work ended any usefulness of circumcision and other ceremonial rites of the old covenant. (CC)

Eschatologically, God promises to remove the “reproach” of his people by swallowing up death forever and wiping away every tear from their eyes (Is 25:8). That promise will be accomplished after the return of Jesus Christ at the bodily resurrection of all people, with the dead in Christ rising to inherit the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:4). The basis for that promise is the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, accomplished at Passover time—Easter. (CC)

5:1–9 In the Promised Land, the nation resumes the practice of circumcision, the sign and seal of God’s covenant with His people, by which He rolls away the reproach of Egypt at Gilgal. Our sin brings us

eternal reproach before God. Through His appointed means today (Baptism), the Lord removes our guilt.
• Thank You, Lord, for rolling away the sin of the world at Golgotha, even as You rolled away the reproach of Egypt at Gilgal. Amen. (TLSB)

First Passover in Canaan

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.

5:10 *Passover.* The ceremonies took place in the month of Abib, the first month of the year (Ex 12:2). At twilight on the 14th day of the month the Passover lamb was to be slaughtered, then roasted and eaten that same night (Ex 12:5–8). Israel had not celebrated Passover since Sinai, one year after her release from Egypt (Nu 9:1–5). Before the next season she had rebelled at the border of Canaan, and the generation of the exodus had been condemned to die in the desert (Nu 14:21–23, 29–35). For that generation the celebration of Passover (deliverance from judgment) could have had little meaning. (CSB)

Israel arrived in the Promised Land on the 10th of Nisan (4:19), the day of selecting Passover lambs (Ex 12:3). The males of Israel were circumcised, a requisite for eating the Passover (Ex 12:48). Thus, the nation could celebrate Passover according to God’s institution under the full moon on the 14th of Nisan in the Promised Land, exactly 40 years after the first Passover. The OT Passover anticipates the Lord’s Supper, which Jesus instituted at Passover (Lk 22:15). (TLSB)

The Passover Feast was far more than food for the body. Instituted by the LORD himself, it was a time of rich spiritual nourishment through food for the soul. The Passover celebration recalled the great release from Egypt (exactly forty years to the day prior to Josh 5:10). Passover meant deliverance and redemption. Like the sparing of Israel and the exodus from bondage that it celebrated, it was a proof and seal of the LORD’s resolve to rescue his people from all their foes (sin, death, and the devil as well as worldly enemies). Nothing could stop him from fulfilling all his covenant promises. He had pushed aside a mighty pharaoh and the waters of the Red Sea so that he could keep his word to Abraham. In the fullness of time, he would redeem all humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his true Passover Lamb. (CC)

The last time Israel had celebrated Passover was one year after the exodus, while in the Desert of Sinai (Num 9:1–5). The nation had observed only two Passovers to date, the original one in Egypt (Exodus 12) and the one in the desert (Numbers 9). This is the very first Passover in the promised land. Moreover, this Passover is a new experience for the vast majority in Israel. Those younger than thirty-nine years old had never participated in a Passover, not even as infants. Even some of those over thirty-nine would have been too young to remember the previous two observances. (CC)

This year with the full moon of Passover over Gilgal, not just children but grown men and women would perhaps be asking the traditional Passover question: “What do you mean by this ceremony?” (Ex 12:26; 13:14; compare the children’s questions about the redemption of Israel in Josh 4:6, 21). This holy meal was intended by God to be the setting for teaching and catechesis about God’s salvation. Therefore it anticipated the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, in which he often used meals as occasions to teach about the kingdom of God. (CC)

This must have been an especially joy-filled Passover as the answers come from Israelites who had personally experienced the bondage, the rescue, the desert years and now are walking in the land that

Yahweh promised their ancestors. Joshua and Caleb, as well as those Israelites now in their forties and fifties, must have delighted in sharing the story of how the destroying angel had *passed over* their houses in Egypt and spared them after they had sacrificed the Passover lamb and painted its blood on their doorframes. The mighty hand of Yahweh had brought them out of the land of slavery. The LORD personally and visibly accompanied his people as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. They crossed through the Red Sea on dry land, even as this new generation had now crossed through the Jordan River on dry land (Josh 4:23 compares the two miracles). They had been sustained by the manna from heaven and by water flowing from a rock (Ex 17:1–6). “That rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4). (CC)

The author provides the detail that Israel celebrates this third Passover “on the plains of Jericho” (Josh 5:10). The mention of “Jericho” (“moon city”) reminds readers that on this night of the full moon, enemies are nearby. (Israel’s spies had reconnoitered the hostile city of Jericho in Joshua 2.) Yet Israel eats the covenant meal in peace. There is no hint of fear, no need to cut short the festivities before the enemy strikes. The grateful expression of Psalm 23 applies here after sunset on the fourteenth of Abib on the plains of Jericho:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. (Ps 23:5) (CC)

How wonderfully ironic it is that Rahab—an ancestor of David, the Israelite king who would author those words—is inside the walls of the enemy city Jericho as Israel celebrates Passover. She is also an ancestor of the Son of David, who would prepare the perfect banquet of salvation and invite all peoples to come and partake. (CC)

The location and Passover lambs suggest another exclamation of Scripture. In this same general area fifteen centuries later John the Baptizer would point to Jesus, the Passover Lamb, and declare, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29). (CC)

5:11 *unleavened cakes*. Bread baked without yeast. It was to be eaten during the seven feast days that followed (Ex 12:15; Lev 23:6). (CSB)

Eaten the week after the Passover (Lv 23:4–6). (TLSB)

מַצּוֹת וְקֵלָיִם—The stipulations for the Passover and the following seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex 12:8, 15–20) included the command to eat מַצּוֹת, the feminine plural of מַצָּה, “flat bread, baked quickly from barley meal and water, with unleavened dough” (*HALOT*, 1). The Israelites, when quickly leaving Egypt, did not have time to wait for their bread to rise and so ate unleavened bread (Ex 12:39). (CC)

The Passover itself and the Feast of Unleavened Bread form a double festival, as we see in Lev 23:4–8. The eating of unleavened bread in Josh 5:11 relates to the second part of the double festival. The text does not make the connection explicit, since Israelite readers would need no explanation. By the command of the LORD, unleavened bread was eaten during the seven days that followed the Passover meal, the fifteenth through twenty-first days of Abib (Lev 23:6). The special detail in Josh 5:11 about this particular unleavened bread is that it is made from the grain of the promised land and that it is eaten together with roasted grain. The Canaanites of the area evidently have fled their fields for the security of the gated and walled city of Jericho (Josh 2:7, 15; 6:1). The Israelites are now eating from fields they did not plant, in fulfillment of God’s promise in Deut 6:11. (CC)

Roasted grain. The noun קֵלָיִם is the Qal passive participle of קָלָה, “to roast, parch.” The word “grain” is not explicitly present but is implied. (CC)

5:12 *manna ceased.* This transition from eating manna to eating the “produce of the land” (v. 11) ended 40 years of dependence on God’s special provision. Manna was God’s gift for the desert journey; from now on he provided Israel with food from the Promised Land. (CSB)

No hint of sadness at the end of the manna. Entry into the “land flowing with milk and honey” (v 6) is a time of joy, and the miraculous manna is no longer needed because of God’s fulfilled promise. By grace, they eat what they did not labor over (cf Dt 6:10–12). (TLSB)

The historical note in Josh 5:12 reveals that the LORD now stops providing “manna,” the unique bread of thin flakes like frost (Ex 16:14) that was white like coriander seed (Ex 16:31). The LORD had rained down manna from heaven for one month less than forty years. Israel began eating the manna in the middle of the second month following the exodus (Ex 16:1, 12), and it stopped in the middle of the first month (Josh 5:11–12) forty years later. It is not clear whether the manna fell and then “stopped” falling on that day, or whether it “stopped” falling in the sense that for the first time it did not fall at all that day. We prefer the latter interpretation. (CC)

There is no touch of sadness implied with the mention of the end of the manna in 5:12. Quite the opposite! The manna itself tasted good, “like wafers made with honey” (Ex 16:31). But for the most part, the era of manna left a bad taste in the mouth of Israel. It was a time of wandering through the “vast and fearful desert, with its fiery serpents and scorpions, and thirsty ground, where there is no water” (Deut 8:15). It was a season of punishment, death, and impatient waiting for the years to pass. Even God’s gracious giving of manna during those years carried with it a painful disciplinary purpose: “to humble you and to test you in order to do good to you in the end” (Deut 8:16; cf. Heb 12:11). (CC)

Although the manna fell from heaven, it did not prevent many Israelites from going to hell. Jesus said to a crowd of Jewish people, “Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died” (Jn 6:49), and many in that crowd grumbled (as did their forefathers) and turned away from Jesus (Jn 6:60–66). Similarly, St. Paul warned, “All ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. But God was not pleased with most of them, for they were destroyed in the wilderness” (1 Cor 10:3–5). Paul uses that example of ancient Israel as a warning for NT Christians to avoid idolatry, evil passions, sexual immorality, grumbling, and testing Christ, lest we too perish (1 Cor 10:6–11). (CC)

Yet by God’s grace, believing Israelites did enter Canaan. A new age has dawned for the covenant people (see the excursus “Covenant”). In Joshua 5, the nation now stands in that “good land—a land with streams of water, with springs and deep waters coming out in the valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, vine, fig tree, and pomegranate; a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will not eat bread in poverty” (Deut 8:7–9). By God’s grace Israel is beginning to eat from fields they neither planted nor tended (see Deut 6:10–12). It is a day on which the LORD’s gracious covenant with his people is confirmed through his covenant rites of circumcision (Josh 5:2–9) and the Passover. The people’s reception of the LORD’s grace through these rites in the promised land shows that the thirty-eight years of judgment are over and that he is reconciled to his people. The manna years were a song written in a minor key that has given way to expressions of rolled-away reproach (5:9) and Passover celebration (5:10–12). The end of manna is thus an occasion for joy in the fulfilled promises of the LORD. (CC)

fruit. Or, “yield,” “produce.” (TLSB)

Great military campaigns are about to start for Israel. We might expect that the camp at Gilgal would be a beehive of activity with assault planning, troop training, and sword sharpening. Instead, abundant time—a whole week or more—is devoted to the LORD for spiritual purposes. The sword of the soldier rests. The ceremonial knife renews the covenant of circumcision. The knife of the father carves the roasted lamb of

Passover for his family. Unleavened bread is broken and eaten with thanks to the LORD. We see here an example of *taking time for first things first*. Israel seeks first the covenant relationship that the LORD has established, in keeping with the statement of 24:31. According to God's promise, he will see to it that military success follows and all physical needs are satisfied. Hence this passage supports the promise of Jesus: "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6:33). (CC)

Not only great military challenges face Israel, but also powerful attractions are waiting. The people will be tempted to live like the native Canaanites: to go after their gods and combine religion with fornication; to live for material things and covet the battle-won booty that is to be devoted only to the LORD (Joshua 7). After the circumcision and Passover at Gilgal, however, the Israelites who will be tempted can take delight in the covenant relationship that the LORD has established and continues to maintain with Israel. The LORD has sealed his solemn pact through circumcision and feeds his people's faith in the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Power for covenant faith and sanctified living was thus provided by God through the divine rites at Gilgal. (CC)

The OT rites of circumcision and Passover anticipate their superior NT counterparts: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism establishes the covenant bond even more surely than circumcision once did, and the Lord's Supper nourishes and strengthens the covenant bond even more substantively than did Passover. (CC)

According to Col 2:9–15, Baptism into Christ is to the new covenant what circumcision was to the old. As circumcision brought an individual Israelite into the divine covenant, so does Baptism. Through the Word and water of Baptism the name of the triune God is placed on us (Mt 28:19). In Baptism the sinful flesh is put off in a spiritual circumcision as we die and are buried with Christ (Col 2:11–13). Our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). We are clothed with Christ's perfect righteousness and become sons of Abraham and heirs of the promise (Gal 3:27–29). The "washing of water with the Word" renders us holy and without blemish in God's sight (Eph 5:26–27). "Baptism now saves you" by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Pet 3:20–21). (CC)

Connections between Passover and the Lord's Supper are likewise evident in the NT. The Lord's Supper was instituted at Passover (Mt 26:17–29). Both are memorial feasts (Ex 12:14 and 1 Co 11:24–26). Jesus declared, "This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24–25), and Paul reminds us that "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Both establish and maintain the fellowship or communion of faith among the qualified participants (Ex 12:44 and 1 Cor 10:17). Therefore pastoral supervision is necessary to exclude unworthy participants who would bring upon themselves judgment (Ex 12:43, 45, 48 and 1 Cor 11:27–32). (CC)

To be sure, the Sacrament of the Altar is superior to the OT Passover. In the Lord's Supper we receive with the bread the true body of Jesus (the Passover Lamb), given for us (Mt 26:26). With the wine we drink his "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). We enjoy these blessings from our covenant Lord, who makes us his very own through Christ the Lamb and empowers us to live as the new people we are through incorporation into him, "for Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). (CC)

The hymn "At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing" expresses the NT theology that relates the Passover, the exodus through the Red Sea, and manna to the salvation of Jesus Christ, which is conferred through the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper:

At the Lamb's high feast we sing
Praise to our victorious king,
Who has washed us in the tide

Flowing from his pierced side. Alleluia! ...

Where the paschal blood is poured,
Death's dread angel sheathes the sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go
Through the wave that drowns the foe. Alleluia!

Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed,
Paschal victim, paschal bread;
With sincerity and love
Eat we manna from above. Alleluia!

What the church now receives from the Lord's Table is also "a foretaste of the feast to come," "the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:6–9). The glorified Lord Jesus Christ promises a seat at his table in paradise to every Christian who perseveres in the faith:

To him who conquers I will give the hidden manna. (Rev 2:17) (CC)

5:10–12 Israel celebrates its spiritual holidays, as the Lord provides for its worldly needs. We sometimes ignore spiritual priorities while fretting over inferior matters. Awareness of God's saving grace and generous gifts leads us to set right priorities and to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt 6:33). • Forgive our materialism, O Lord, and lead us to give priority to Your heavenly treasures. Amen. (TLSB)

The Commander of the LORD's Army

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[c] 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.

5:13–6:5 The narration of the conquest is introduced by the sudden appearance of a heavenly figure who calls himself the "commander of the army of the LORD" (5:14). (CSB)

5:13–15 The person whom Joshua encounters is sequentially (1) a man with drawn sword; (2) the commander of the army of the Lord; (3) one whom Joshua worships and calls "my lord"; (4) one before whom Joshua is to remove his sandals as Moses did before the Lord in Ex 3:5; and (5) and one whose presence makes the place holy, also as in Ex 3:5. (TLSB)

Satan and Man's Sin Started Warfare

Before the rebellion of Satan, war did not exist. In the original, perfect heaven and earth, God's peace reigned supreme. Even the term *ἰσχυρ*, "host," which later became associated with warfare and the angelic and human armies of the LORD of hosts, simply referred to the vast array of wonderful features and creatures in God's perfect and peaceful creation (Gen 2:1). But Satan rebelled against God and seduced Adam and Eve into sin (Genesis 3), and the great dragon swept one third of the starry host out of heaven—the angels who became demons (Rev 12:4). Continuing spiritual wars and earthly clashes are the result of that cosmic conflict. The fall of man into sin brought hatred and death into the world, just as God had warned (Gen 2:17). Mankind quickly manifested its sinfulness through murder (Gen 4:8, 23) and violence (Gen 6:5, 11–13). Humanity's conflict is first vertical, because reprobate man naturally hates the just and

holy God, and then horizontal, between people, even between husband and wife (Gen 3:16), who are united as one flesh. (CC)

The first point that must be made, then, is that wars will continue to flare up between sinful human beings as long as they live in this fallen world, in which Satan is at work. The devil is the original murderer, and he continues to foster hatred and killing. Christ himself declared that there would continue to be wars and rumors of war, and that “it is necessary for this to happen” (Mt 24:6; similar are Mk 13:7; Lk 21:9). Only when he returns in glory to bring this world to its end and fully subjugate Satan will war cease. (CC)

Therefore every utopian religion or philosophy that has the goal of eliminating all earthly warfare is doomed to fail because it fails to reckon with the total depravity of human nature and the ongoing activity of Satan in this world. (CC)

Christ’s Divine Warfare Achieves Victory and Salvation

The second and crucial point is that divine warfare is God’s means for saving his chosen people. For the sake of OT Israel, God engaged in temporal and national warfare, while for the salvation of all believers of both Testaments, God won the spiritual war through the physical death of Jesus on the cross and his bodily resurrection. Without this divine warfare, mankind would have been doomed to eternity in hell, but God’s warfare enabled Israel to inherit the promised land, and his victory on the cross has made all believers heirs of eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. (CC)

Immediately after the fall, God set about to destroy the alliance Satan had forged with Adam and Eve. The redemption of sinful humanity required warfare. For the reconciliation of fallen mankind to himself and for peace between people, it was God himself who established a state of “enmity” (הֶאֱרִיב) or open hostility between Satan and Eve, and between his seed and her children. The LORD cursed the serpent:

Enmity I shall place between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed.
He shall crush your head, and you shall crush his heel. (Gen 3:15) (CC)

Thus God declared a perpetual war that would culminate at the cross and result in God justifying sinners, thus undoing the devil’s deed. The war or enmity that the LORD God initiated was between the serpent and the woman and between the serpent’s seed and her seed. While the conflict would involve the entire human race, the turning point of the bloody war would come when one particular Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, who would crush that Seed’s heel (Gen 3:15). (CC)

God thus became the mighty warrior, who in the fullness of time would become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, the chosen Seed of Eve, in order to deliver a mortal wound to Satan (Jn 12:31; 16:11; 1 Jn 3:8) and to deliver mankind from sin and its terrible consequences by granting “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” (Apostles’ Creed). The risen Christ is now enthroned at the Father’s right hand, exercising all power and authority over earthly conflicts among peoples and over all spiritual wars with the powers of darkness so that God’s saving purpose may prevail.^c Through Christ, God has reconciled “all things to himself—whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens—having made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). (CC)

Since God himself declared war on Satan and his minions right after the fall (Genesis 3), the image of God as a mighty warrior appears early in Scripture. The first large-scale war in Scripture was the alliance of four kings who attacked five others, and God enabled Abraham to rescue Lot and be blessed by Melchizedek (Genesis 14). The ten plagues on Egypt and the drowning of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea were the LORD’s own attacks. After the exodus redemption of Israel, Moses sings in his victory song about the incarnational character of their Warrior-God:

The LORD is a man of war;
the LORD is his name. (Ex 15:3) (CC)

Israel, the LORD's chosen nation from whom would come the Seed-Warrior, may be armed for war, march into battles boldly, and fight valiantly, but it is the LORD-Warrior who conducts the war for the benefit of his people. Thus Moses commands the Israelites to stand by silently while the LORD accomplishes the victory: "Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will do for you today. ... The LORD will wage war for you; you yourselves should keep quiet" (Ex 14:13–14). (CC)

The book of Joshua has striking historical records of the personal involvement of the LORD in the battles of Israel for the Promised Land. God told Israel that it was "not by [their] sword and not by [their] bow" that they were victorious over the Canaanites (Josh 24:12). The LORD himself must fight and achieve the victory for the benefit of his people, in keeping with the biblical doctrine of divine monergism (versus synergism) in salvation. (CC)

The preincarnate Christ appears to Joshua as "the Commander of the host of the LORD" (5:14–15) with sword drawn (5:13), ready to make war against the foes of God and his people Israel. This advent of the imminent LORD, who is always with his people, takes place before the war for Canaan begins. Throughout the ensuing war, God encourages Joshua and Israel just before the various battles take place (e.g., 6:2; 8:1). He orders specific strategies, such as the sequence of liturgical processions around Jericho with his ark and priests leading the way (Joshua 6); setting an ambush against Ai (8:2); and hamstringing the enemies' horses and burning their chariots (11:6). He musters the forces of nature to bring about victory for Israel: he stops the waters of the Jordan so his people can cross over (Joshua 3–4), rains down hailstones on his enemies (10:11), and causes the sun and moon to stand still (10:12–14). The direct involvement of the omnipotent LORD of heaven and earth in the wars of Joshua assures victory for his redeemed people. (CC)

The Seed of the woman must inherit the land through the nation from whom he will spring according to his human nature (Rom 9:5) so that he may crush the serpent underfoot (Gen 3:15), and thus God will make his enemies his footstool (Psalm 110). The leaders of Israel place their feet on the necks of the defeated Canaanite kings, impale them on trees, and then bury them in a cave, occluding the entrance with a large stone (Josh 10:24–27). This prefigures how Christ's crushing of the serpent underfoot also secures the victory for his people: "The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet soon" (Rom 16:20). Just as those enemies were hung on trees then buried in a cave, so too were the ultimate enemies of God's people—our own sins and sinful nature—nailed to a tree in Christ's crucifixion, then buried with him through Christian Baptism (Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:12–15). But while the large stone secured the tomb of the Canaanite kings "to this very day" (Josh 10:27), the large stone was rolled away from the tomb of Jesus Christ, thus promising the resurrection of the body and eternal life for all believers (Mk 16:3–4). Thus Christ "himself is our peace" because his vicarious atonement, death, and resurrection have made peace and reconciled us to God "through the cross, killing the enmity" (Eph 2:14–16). (CC)

Divine Warfare as God's Just Punishment on Human Sin

A third point is that justified warfare is God's means to punish evildoers and that such punishment is necessary to curb sin and maintain temporal order. God carries out such punishment not only for the good and stability of societies, but also so that his church can do its proper work of proclaiming the Gospel. A pacifist religion or philosophy actually contributes to violence and iniquity by failing to curtail evildoers—by death if necessary. God may be patient for long periods of time, justice may be delayed, and evildoers may evade their temporal due, but the final day of reckoning will come. (CC)

To comprehend the twofold meaning of the military conquest of Canaan by Israel in the book of Joshua, we need to bear in mind that the LORD is a God of Law and Gospel, judgment and salvation. He damns

the impenitent to eternity in hell and justifies penitent believers, making them heirs of eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. Both of these actions are expressions of his character as the one holy and righteous God. (CC)

The Scriptures declare: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16). “The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive to us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). At the same time God’s Word states: “If deliberately we keep on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, no longer is a sacrifice for sins left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and a zeal of fire that is going to eat the opponents” (Heb 10:26–27; see also Heb 10:28–31). (CC)

God tolerated the unrepentant sin and unbelief of the Canaanites for a long time. Centuries earlier the LORD had said to Abraham that his “fourth generation shall return here, because the iniquity of the Amorites is not full until now” (Gen 15:16). At the time of Joshua, the sin of the Canaanite peoples finally reached its full measure in God’s eyes. They were ripe for his judgment at the time of the conquest. In patience God had given the peoples of Canaan centuries of clemency to repent of their idolatry and the immorality that followed. They spurned him by such abominations as incest, divination, consulting the dead, casting spells, engaging in cultic prostitution, sacrificing their own sons and daughters by fire, homosexuality, bestiality, and other detestable practices. See, for example, Leviticus 18 and 20 and Deut 18:9–11 for lists of Canaanite cultic arts. (CC)

God commanded his people, “Do not make yourselves unclean by all these, because by all these the nations that I am driving out from before you became unclean, and the land became unclean, and I punished her iniquity upon her, and the land vomited out her inhabitants” (Lev 18:24–25; see also Lev 20:23; Deut 18:12–14). God warned that he would punish his own people in the same way if they engaged in these abominations. Therefore these passages make clear that God judges all peoples by the same standards and shows no partiality. The OT laws against idolatry, occult practices, homosexuality, bestiality, human sacrifice, and other abominations, together with the dire warnings of divine judgment upon those who do them, remain authoritative for all peoples today. The NT too affirms that doing such things incurs the eschatological wrath of God and terrible punishments. (CC)

Hoerth presents this description of Canaanite gods and religion:

The Canaanites were polytheists like the rest of Near Eastern cultures. Canaanite deities were rather fluid in personality and function, but some idea of their pantheon can be gained. El, their chief god, was a rather nebulous figure who lived far away “at the source of the two rivers.” He was considered the father of humans and gods and was called “Father Bull.” El probably killed his father and emasculated him; he killed his favorite son, cut off a daughter’s head, and sacrificed another son to his dead father. El seduced, or was seduced by, two women who were subsequently driven out into the desert when they bore children. (CC)

El’s wife was Asherah. She is usually associated with fertility, and a sacred pillar or tree was her symbol. Several times Moses commanded the Israelites to get rid of Asherah’s pillars when they conquered the land (e.g., Deut. 7:5; 16:21). Of El and Asherah’s many children, the most important, Baal, controlled the rain and therefore vegetation. Baal was the god of storm, his voice was thunder. Anat, Baal’s wife and sister, was goddess of love and fertility, but also of war. Canaanites thought of her as both a prostitute and a virgin. In one text she rejoices as she wades in the gore of worshipers she has killed. (CC)

The Canaanites were primarily interested in ritualistic outward acts that would make their gods treat them more favorably. The Canaanites developed histories for their deities as they attempted to explain and placate the unknown, and there was a fervent attempt to “make it work.” Canaanite

sacrificial ritual was more diversified than Israel's; more kinds of animals were offered, and human sacrifice was sometimes required. There is no indication that Canaanite gods handed down a moral code for their people to follow. ... To the Canaanite, fertility was of major importance in worship, and both male and female temple prostitution was prevalent. God inspired Moses to forewarn Israel against such practice (Deut. 23:17–18 [MT 23:18–19]). (CC)

Palestine was dotted with Canaanite high places, sacred trees, and elaborate temples. Some of the preserved literature and cult objects reveal a strong focus on the sexual and show the great gulf that existed between the Israelite and Canaanite religions. (CC)

It was precisely because of these detestable manifestations of unbelief, finally fully blown, that the LORD would condemn and destroy the peoples of Canaan. As in Egypt, his patience finally expired and his judgment struck. He used war—a holy war with Israel as his soldiers—to carry out his judgment. He commanded Moses and Joshua to carry out the *cherem*, that is, devotion to God by total destruction. Some modern Westerners might consider the LORD's action to be unfair because of the principle of collective retribution—entire cities were wiped out, including men, women, and children—and cruel because of the kinds of violence Israel employed at God's command. (CC)

Also today, God tolerates widespread unbelief and resulting evil. Scoffers interpret God's patience as a sign that Christ will not return as promised, and that the world will keep going indefinitely (2 Pet 3:3–7). But the Lord is patient to allow time for repentance, because he does not want any to perish (2 Pet 3:9). Eventually this fallen world will end and the day of universal judgment will arrive. “The day of the Lord will come like a thief, on which [day] the heavens roaringly will pass away; and the elements, burned up, will be abolished; and the earth and the deeds [done] on it will be exposed. ... But new heavens and a new earth according to his promise we are awaiting, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:10, 13). (CC)

One can see the destruction of pagan Canaan as a prefiguration of the destruction of all unbelievers at the end of the world. Likewise, the fall of Jericho may be compared to the fall of unfaithful Jerusalem—first in 587 B.C. to Babylon, and then in A.D. 70 to the Romans. Christ himself depicts the imminent fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as the beginning of the end of the world, to be completed on the unknown day of his parousia (Mt 23:37–24:51). (CC)

The fall of Jerusalem is a reminder that God shows no partiality. Should his own people fall into unbelief, idolatry, and immorality, he judges them just as severely as other pagans. He is fair, as Josh 23:15–16 and 24:20 make clear. If his covenant nation turns away from him, the name “Israelite” will carry no more grace than “Canaanite,” “Amorite,” “Hittite,” or “Sodomite,” as Jesus declares about the cities who rejected him (Mt 10:15; 11:20–24; see also the excursus “Covenant”). In breaking the covenant, Israel's name would be added to the list of nations driven from the land because the LORD's anger burned against the Israelites, just as it had against the Canaanites. All Israel became *cherem* because of Achan's covenant transgression, and God's burning wrath was averted only after Achan's execution (Joshua 7). (CC)

As the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites, they inherited what they had forfeited by their sin. But as God had used Israel as his army against Canaanites, he would use Assyrians and Babylonians against Israel when she proved unfaithful. In turn, he would use Persia to defeat an arrogant Babylon. Finally, he would use ethnic Israel's predominant rejection of his incarnate Son as the occasion to ingraft multitudes of Gentile believers in Christ into his kingdom, and thus all Israel—“the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16), the new creation consisting of all baptized believers in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike—shall be saved (Romans 9–11). (CC)

The Church's Warfare Is Spiritual

We see the long history of divine warfare culminate at the cross in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, who atoned vicariously for the sin and rebellion of the whole world. As he lay dead in the tomb, he appeared vanquished by the devil, who had entered his betrayer, Judas. But on earth's gladdest day, he rose as the victor, having conquered sin, Satan, and death. Paradoxically, the instrument of his death was his instrument of conquest: "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col 2:15). He is the stronger man who has disarmed the strong man—the devil—and plundered the devil's palace (Lk 11:22) by freeing those the devil had kept in bondage. (CC)

Yet Christ's triumph has not taken away the need for the church to fight. Instead, Scripture depicts an intensification of the spiritual warfare in which the church must now engage. After the ascension of Christ and his session in divine glory (Rev 12:5), a fiercer spiritual war broke out:

And there arose war in heaven—Michael and his angels to wage war against the dragon. And the dragon waged war and his angels with him, but he was not strong enough, and neither was any place found for them any longer in heaven. And he was cast down—the great dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world—he was cast down to the earth, and his angels with him were cast down. (Rev 12:7–9) (CC)

The deposed devil no longer can approach God in heaven to accuse God's saints (Rev 12:10), as he did in the OT era (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Zech 3:1). On one hand, Christ's triumph causes his saints to rejoice in the salvation he has procured for them (Rev 12:10–11). But on the other hand, Scripture proclaims "woe" to those still on earth "because the devil has come down to you having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time" (Rev 12:12). During the entire NT age the devil wages furious war against the seed of the woman who represents the church; her seed are "those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17). (CC)

Yet the church is not just to be on the defensive; she is to take the offensive, even against the gates of hell (Mt 16:18). The main task of the church is to carry out this spiritual warfare by the proclamation of the Gospel, which drives out the devil and destroys his evil works, rescuing sinners and incorporating them into the people and kingdom of God. Thus when Jesus sent out his twelve apostles and the seventy-two disciples, he did not send them to kill people or destroy cities. Rather, he commanded the twelve to proclaim, "The kingdom of God has come near," and to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Mt 10:7–8; cf. Lk 10:5–10). (CC)

The result of this Gospel ministry is that the demons were subjugated by the name of Jesus, and he exclaimed, "I was watching Satan falling like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18). Through the Gospel ministry of Christ's disciples, Satan is deposed. Hence the traditional rite of confirmation includes the question "Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?" with the answer, "I do renounce them," followed by the Apostles' Creed as a confession of the confirmand's new Lord and King. (CC)

Through the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments, lost sinners are transferred from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. This transfer took place through OT Israel too, as in the cases of the former prostitute Rahab and her family (Josh 6:22–25) and the Gibeonites (Joshua 9), who were spared, incorporated into God's Israel, and justified before God (Heb 11:31 and James 2:25 affirm this about Rahab). The Gibeonites even became sanctuary servants, cutting wood and drawing water for "the house of my [Joshua's] God" and "for the altar of the LORD" (Josh 9:23, 27). (CC)

The Christian Gospel in Word and Sacrament rescues the perishing from eternal destruction and fortifies them to do battle against the forces of evil within (the sinful flesh) and without (the devil and the world) that assail them. It is necessary for Christians to oppose detestable practices such as idolatry, sexual

immorality, homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and occult practices, which correspond to the ancient abominations of the Canaanites. The church rightly prohibits God's people from engaging in such practices. The church also rightly endeavors to persuade society at large to prohibit such evils, and to do so Christians work peacefully through lawful means, not by violence. (CC)

When such sinful practices tenaciously continue to dwell within God's kingdom (much as some Canaanites did in Josh 15:63; 17:12–13), the church must extirpate them through spiritual means, namely, church discipline and, if necessary, excommunication (Mt 18:15–20; Rom 16:17–20; 1 Corinthians 5). Hence the Christian practice that corresponds most closely to the OT implementation of the *cherem* ban (Josh 2:10; 6:17–18) is the office of the keys, which is a declaration of God's sentence of salvation for the penitent or damnation for those who remain impenitent:

Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you. As the Father sent me, so also I am sending you." Having said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they [the sins] are forgiven to them; if you retain [the sins] of any, they are retained." (Jn 20:21–23; cf. Mt 16:19; Rev 1:18) (CC)

The divine command to destroy and kill physically was given to Joshua and OT Israel. To the NT church God does not give any command to mete out corporal punishment, death, or destruction. Instead, the warfare of the Christian church is conducted by forgiving the sins of the penitent and retaining the sins of the impenitent. The day of one visible nation serving as God's fighting force is past; its purpose was served. All Christians on earth comprise the one true, invisible church—the church militant. (CC)

All the martial language of the NT referring to the battles of believers is used in a spiritual sense. We put on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10–20). Our war is against sin, Satan, and death. Victory is ours in Jesus Christ, who has already defeated the unholy three. Through him we are "more than conquerors" (Rom 8:37). To be sure, through the Sacraments this warfare involves the body, which is sanctified as a temple of the Holy Spirit for the doing of good works with the promise of the resurrection. But the warfare is conducted spiritually, by the means of grace and "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6:17), rather than weapons of bronze or iron. "For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). (CC)

5:13 *Joshua was near Jericho.* The leader of God's army went to scout the nearest Canaanite stronghold, but another warrior was already on the scene. (CC)

Joshua is evidently by himself, away from the Israelite's camp at Gilgal, analyzing Jericho, Israel's first target. The Hebrew says literally that Joshua was "in Jericho," perhaps meaning "in the immediate vicinity of Jericho." The utter surprise for the reader and for Joshua as he meets the sword-carrying man comes out in the Hebrew expression: "he raised his eyes, and he looked, and behold, a man was standing in front of him" (5:13). (CC)

a man standing. The experience is taken by many to be an encounter with God in human form (theophany), or with Christ (Christophany). But angels also were sent on missions of this kind (Jdg 6:11; 13:3), and some were identified as captains over the heavenly armies (Da 10:5, 20; 12:1). (CSB)

Man is in fighting stance with unsheathed sword. An astonished Joshua wonders whom the man intends to fight. Jerome: "Joshua went forth, and was met by the Prince of the host, sword in hand, that is either to show that he was ready to fight for the circumcised people, or to sever the tie [to them].... If the armed host of the Lord was represented by the trumpets of the priests, we may see in Jericho a type of the overthrow of the world by the preaching of the Gospel" (NPNF 2 6:362). (TLSB)

The term *אֱלֹהִים* does not preclude the heavenly nature and divine identity of this “man.” Strikingly similar to Josh 5:13 is Gen 18:2: Abraham “raised his eyes [same idiom as in Josh 5:13], and he looked [same verb as in Josh 5:13], and behold [וַיִּבְרַח, as in Josh 5:13] three *men* [אֲנָשִׁים, plural of *אִישׁ*] were standing before him.” It turns out that two of those “men” were angels and one was the LORD himself (Gen 18:13–19:1). (CC)

5:14 *Neither.* Joshua and Israel must know their place—it is not that God is on their side; rather, they must fight God’s battles. (CSB)

Why the drawn sword in the man’s hand? Does he want to fight Joshua or Israel or Israel’s enemies? While Joshua is startled, he is not afraid to walk up to the mysterious stranger to ask whose side he is on. Perhaps this is evidence of Joshua’s bravery, strengthened by the LORD’s encouragement and the recent miracle of crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3–4). The stranger’s answer is as surprising as his sudden appearance. He answers first with an abrupt “No!” (5:14). In phrasing his question, Joshua had assumed that the stranger is a mere human taking one side or the other in the earthly combat. The sharp “No” or perhaps “Neither!” (CC)

commander of the army of the LORD. God has sent the commander of his heavenly armies to take charge of the battle on earth. Joshua must take orders from him (6:2–5), and he can also know that the armies of heaven are committed to this war—as later events confirm. (CSB)

Hbr word can refer to a representative of a king, an official, a leader, or various kinds of military or civilian officials. Can also refer to an angel. In Is 9:6, the Child is called the “Prince [Commander] of Peace.” In Dn 8:11, God is called “the Prince of the host [army].” (TLSB)

Luther considered the Commander to be the preincarnate Christ:

The Word of God must be under arms and fight. Therefore the followers of the Word are called an “army” (Ps. 68[12; ET 68:11]), and Christ is designated as a “commander” [Josh. 5:14]. (AE 40:57) (CC)

Johann Gerhard cites Josh 5:13–14 among the OT passages that reveal the mystery of the Trinity. He says that the Commander (*princeps*) is not a creature, but the Lord and Creator, God the Son, who is also Yahweh, the one who speaks to Joshua in 6:2 and who led the Israelites from Egypt and fought against their enemies. Joshua worships him, as only God is to be worshiped (Mt 4:10). (CC)

Luther frequently interpreted “the angel of the LORD” in the OT to be the preincarnate Christ, the second person of the Trinity, and there has been a long line of orthodox Lutheran interpreters down to the present who have taken that same view. (CC)

The old Christian doctrine is that the Angel of God’s presence was that Divine Being who is represented in the New Testament as the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His Person [Heb 1:3], the image of God [2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15], in whose face the glory of God shines [2 Cor 4:6] and in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily [Col 2:9]. (CC)

We prefer to identify this Commander with the Son of God in his preincarnate state. We think that Luther’s best known hymn asks the question and gives the fitting answer for this context. In fact, the entire hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” could well be sung by Joshua and Israel here at Jericho:

But for us fights the valiant One,
Whom God himself elected.

Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is,
Of sabaoth [“hosts”] Lord,
And there’s none other God;
He holds the field forever. (CC)

That hymn reflects the many Scripture passages that indicate that as the church militant wages war on earth, at the same time an unseen spiritual war is being fought by the hosts of heaven against the devil and his hordes. Only rarely are God’s people given a glimpse of the spiritual forces mustered for war. For example, in one night an angel killed 185,000 troops of Sennacherib’s army (2 Ki 19:35), and as Elisha and his servant were besieged, God let them see the hosts of heaven amassed to protect them (2 Ki 6:15–17). Here Joshua is privileged to see and speak with the divine Commander of the LORD’s entire “host”—those in heaven as well as those on earth. (CC)

Since Joshua himself, by the LORD’s own commission (1:1–9), is the supreme earthly general of the army of the LORD, the assertion of the “man” implies that he is over Joshua, and he must be a *heavenly, divine* Commander. His words “Now I have come” suggest that he has arrived for just this time when Israel’s battles are about to begin. The skills of Joshua and the strength of the army of Israel cannot assure victory. The “Commander” and “the host of the LORD” must always be behind the scenes to give success. Beyond that, Joshua would have the wrong perspective if he were to think that the LORD always takes sides in human combat and that the LORD must always be on his side. Rather, Joshua is to make sure that he is *on the LORD’s side*, that he follows the *LORD’s* commands and that he fights the *LORD’s* battles. (CC)

It is evident that Joshua receives in this awesome encounter another powerful message of encouragement from the LORD just before battles begin. For earlier encouragements, see, for example, Josh 1:9; 2:24; and the miracle in chapters 3–4. In 5:14 Joshua had asked for a message from the Commander. Now he receives it in 5:15. By echoing Ex 3:5, the Commander communicates that the holy, powerful LORD is with Joshua just as he was with Moses. If Israel throws away all that stands opposed to the covenant—just as Joshua removed his dusty sandals—and fights the battles of the LORD in obedience and reverent faith, the heaven-sent Commander will ensure their victory. (CC)

Who can stand against the LORD with his heavenly and earthly forces? Can the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, or any of the seven nations (3:10)? Can Jericho, Ai, Hazor, or any of the fortified cities? God had assured Joshua, “No one will be able to hold his ground against you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you” (Josh 1:5). Can the gates of hell (Mt 16:18) or all the combined powers of darkness? Christians are reminded here of the great NT truth: “If God is for us, who can be against us? ... We are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:31, 37). (CC)

Now I have come. His arrival is timely, just before battles begin. (TLSB)

Notice how these verses successively zoom in to sharpen the focus on the mysterious visitor. In 5:13 he is simply “a man” with a sword. In 5:14 he is the “Commander of the host of the LORD,” before whom Joshua bows in worship. In 5:15 the Commander gives the same command that the LORD himself issued to Moses from the burning bush (Ex 3:5). The presence of the Commander causes the place where he is standing to be “holy.” (CC)

worshiped. Physically bending low. (TLSB)

my Lord. A term of respect for a superior. (CSB)

Hbr *'adoni*, “my lord.” The same word is used of God in 3:11, 13, so perhaps here it refers to Yahweh, the Lord. (TLSB)

5:15 Joshua is commissioned to undertake the Lord’s battles for Canaan, just as Moses had been commissioned to confront Pharaoh (Ex 3:5). (CSB)

5:13–15 Joshua has a surprise encounter with the commander of the army of the Lord, who will provide him success in battle. When we think we have the strength to fight our spiritual enemies, we are on our way to defeat. Through Word and Sacraments, God leads us to rely on His strength for victory (cf Rm 8:31). • “For us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.... He holds the field forever.” Amen. (LSB 656:2) (TLSB)